Making a Living in Uncertainty. Agro-Pastoral Livelihoods and Institutional Transformations in Post-Socialist Rural Kyrgyzstan

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Dedicated to my late grandfather

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Bernd Steimann, Zurich, June 2010

"Kirghizstan has truly undergone a complete transformation. It is of its hard past, wonderful present and still more beautiful future (…) that I shall speak (…)."

Dikambayev 1960, 6

"I have witnessed three systems: the pre-socialist, the socialist and the capitalist system. But today I don't know what kind of system we live in anymore – it seems to be a barbarian system. The taxes are so high!"

Abdyrasul Tashtanov, retired teacher,
Kyzyl-Tuu, 2008

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Glossary

Kyrgyz and Russian terms

Adat	Kyrgyz religious and customary law
Aksakal	'White beard'; respected elder men
Ashar	Practice of mutual assistance without monetary award
Atar	A flock of 500 to 600 sheep
Ayil	'Village'
Ayil Bas'chy	'Head of village'; village leader
Ayil Kengesh	'Village council'; the communal legislative
Ayil Okmotu	'Village government'; the communal executive
Bai, bailar	'Rich man', 'rich men'
Jailoo	'Summer pasture'
Jaztoo	'Spring pasture'
Kairak jer	'Rainfed land'
Kolkhoz	'Collective farm' [Russ. *kollektivnoye khozyaystvo*]
Kuda	'In-laws'; extended family
Kyshtoo	'Winter pasture'
Kyztoo	'Autumn pasture'
Oblast	Province
Rayon	District
Rayon Akim	District leader
Sherine	Neighbourhood circles
Sovkhoz	'State farm' [Russ. *sovetskoye khozyaystvo*]
Sugat jer	'Irrigated land'
Tülöö	Spring gathering
Ulak Tartysh	Traditional horse game
Uruu	Tribe, clan
Uruk	'Seed'; tribal sub-unit
Üi-bülö	Nuclear family

Exchange rates

Hectare [ha]	1 hectare = 10,000 m^2
Sotik	1 *sotik* = 0.01 ha = 100 m^2
Som [KGS]	Due to inflation and exchange rate fluctuations during the time of research, exchange rates used refer to the respective date of data collection. By 15 Sept 2007, the *Som* was 41.5 to the US $; by 15 Sept 2008, it was 34.6 to the US $. All exchange rates are based on www.oanda.com.

Abbreviations

AISP	Agricultural Investment and Services Project
CAMP	Central Asian Mountain Partnership
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CAS	Central Asian States
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GosRegistr	State Agency on Registration of Rights to Immovable Property
HDI	Human Development Index
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LRF	Land Redistribution Fund
MAWRPI	Kyrgyz Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Processing Industry
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NCCR N-S	National Centre of Competence in Research North-South
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAMS	Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes
PUA	Pasture Users' Association
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TPS	Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization
WUA	Water Users' Association
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Abstract

Over the last two decades, academic and policy-oriented debates on development in post-socialist societies and economies have thrown up starkly contrasting approaches to conceptualizing post-socialist development. The early 1990s were dominated by the neoliberal Washington Consensus, which considered 'transition' a rapid and linear process of change from the socialist economy towards modern market capitalism. The tools that were meant to bring about this change included rapid privatization of state assets, price liberalization and deregulation of markets. However, things went seriously wrong. By the mid-1990s it had become obvious that many countries whose governments had followed the Washington Consensus were experiencing the fastest rates of poverty increase worldwide and that socioeconomic disparities had rapidly worsened. The weakening of the neoliberal hegemony eventually gave way to alternative approaches to post-socialist development. They built on the idea of 'transformation' as a bundle of evolutionary, multi-directional and open-ended processes, in which actors recombine and improvise on the old and the new in order to cope with the numerous challenges 'transition' poses. These alternative approaches promoted a shift away from the previous macroeconomic focus towards multi-level analysis and particularly emphasized actor research at the micro level.

The present study takes up these approaches to examine processes of post-socialist transformation in rural Kyrgyzstan. After 1991, Kyrgyzstan was among the fastest neoliberal reformers in the former Soviet Union. Collective farms were dissolved and rural households endowed with private property rights over arable land, livestock, infrastructure and machinery. However, rural Kyrgyzstan today is experiencing widespread poverty and a considerable divide between the wealthy and the poor. In order to gain a better understanding of these processes, the study adopts a livelihoods perspective to examine the recursive relationship between various actors engaged in agro-pastoral production and the institutional and organizational context. To do so, it draws on advances in – among others – new institutional economics, property rights theory and legal pluralism. The empirical data presented here were obtained during a total of 10 months' field research between 2006 and 2009 in two case study villages in Naryn *oblast* (province), Central Kyrgyzstan. The study combines quantitative and qualitative methods, i.e. a household survey; semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives of local households and state representatives at various levels, and others; participant observation and group discussions.

The first focus of the study is on the existence and emergence of socioeconomic disparities at the level of rural households. A quantitative household survey carried out in spring 2007 revealed a striking gap between wealthy and poor households in terms of livestock ownership, which is a common wealth indicator in rural Kyrgyzstan. On the one hand, there are many households with no animals of their own, as well as numerous smallholders with very small private flocks. On the other hand, there are a few large farm households with large private flocks and access to more private arable land per capita than others. Further qualitative analysis showed that these disparities are not entirely new. Instead, they already existed in the socialist economy, where the principles of rational redistribution and allocative power allowed rural elites to accumulate more wealth than others. At the same time, however, the symbiosis between the official and the so-called 'second' economy – in the form of illicit transfers between state-controlled and private production – also ensured the survival of the less wealthy rural population. In many cases, the rapid privatization of the Kyrgyz agriculture in the 1990s exacerbated these existing disparities. The reasons for this include the prominent role of rural elites in the dissolution of 'their' kolkhoz and the sometimes unfair distribution of land, livestock and infrastructure; legislative reforms which often lagged behind decisions taken at the local level and a lack of control by

higher levels of the state administration; a poorly planned distribution process which led to the loss of thousands of animals due to fodder shortages and uncontrolled diseases; and a striking lack of knowledge among many ordinary kolkhoz workers about how they should establish a private peasant farm and profitable agro-pastoral production. Research thus suggests that the privatization of the Kyrgyz agriculture took place in a hybrid institutional context. Far from being a just and proper distribution of assets along neoliberal rules, it was instead a final round of resource allocation along organizing practices and social networks inherited from the socialist economy.

The second focus of the study is on the various actors, practices, organizations and institutions around current agro-pastoral production. It examines how people negotiate, defend and use their property rights over arable land, livestock and pastures. Evidence shows that private land ownership endows people with an economic and symbolic value that suggests a certain sense of security. At the same time, however, it implies new liabilities. Irrigation is subject to the payment of user fees and contributions to maintenance costs, the terms for the use of machinery must be constantly renegotiated, and arable land is subject to taxes. Land cultivation has thus become closely related to monetary exchange. This represents a major obstacle to many among the less wealthy, who often struggle to earn sufficient cash in the local context. More than ten years after the heyday of reforms, the concept of private farm units has not yet come into its own, land has become a liability for many, and a great deal of land has fallen out of production. In terms of animal husbandry, evidence shows that most rural households consider livestock not only a key financial asset that can be converted into cash whenever the need arises, but also a pivotal point for the reproduction of social relations and the definition of wealth. Wealth in the form of livestock is often equal to negotiating power over resources and also governs people's access to pastures. Evidence shows that wealthier households can refer to formal rules and regulations when they are handy for securing their claim over pastures, but also recombine these rules with other less formal strategies and routine behavior. At the same time, less wealthy households are often unaware of the existing pasture law, or else have no means of referring to or circumventing it.

In conclusion, the changes in property relations stemming from the Kyrygz agrarian reforms redefined the economic value and social significance of land and other resources, as well as the livelihood prospects of and the social relations between the asset-rich and the asset-poor. To a considerable extent, community life has evolved according to the logic of the market and social relations have become embedded in a poorly regulated economic system. While wealthy and powerful households can extend their property rights over resources, the less powerful often struggle against various forms of uncertainty, which seriously undermines their prospects to escape the vicious cycle of short-term coping and resource depletion. In the long run, this may exacerbate rural socioeconomic disparities. Under these circumstances, the study suggests that the introduction of new laws and regulations needs careful consideration and must be embedded in a thorough understanding of the specific processes that cause and reproduce disparities between potential stakeholders. Otherwise, apparently 'strong' new rules and 'robust' institutions run the risk of widening the existing gap between the rich and the poor.

Zusammenfassung

Die akademischen und politischen Entwicklungsdebatten der letzten zwei Jahrzehnte haben unterschiedliche Zugänge und Strategien postsozialistischer Entwicklung hervorgebracht. In den frühen 1990ern dominierte der neoliberale Ansatz des 'Washington Consensus', welcher 'Transition' als einen raschen, linearen Wechsel von der sozialistischen Staatswirtschaft hin zur freien Marktwirtschaft begriff. Die propagierten Mittel lauteten Privatisierung, Liberalisierung und Deregulierung. Mitte der Neunzigerjahre jedoch geriet das neoliberale Modell in die Kritik, denn viele jener Staaten, welche ihre Reformpolitik am 'Washington Consensus' ausgerichtet hatten, wiesen den weltweit höchsten Armutszuwachs sowie sich rasch verschärfende sozioökonomische Disparitäten auf. Die seither entstandenen alternativen Erklärungsansätze interpretieren postsozialistische Entwicklung daher als ein Bündel pfadabhängiger, von handelnden Akteuren gestalteter Prozesse und umschreiben sie mit dem Begriff der 'Transformation'. Dies impliziert die Abwendung von einer rein makroökonomischen Betrachtungsweise hin zur Berücksichtigung miteinander verknüpfter Handlungsfelder und der damit verbundenen Akteursgruppen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit folgt diesen alternativen Ansätzen mit dem Ziel, Transformationsprozesse im postsozialistischen ländlichen Kirgistan zu beschreiben und unterschiedliche Entwicklungspfade auf der lokalen und der Haushalts-Ebene zu erklären. Kaum ein Nachfolgestaat der Sowjetunion setzte nach 1991 so rasch und entschieden auf neoliberale Reformen wie die Kirgisische Republik. Schon früh wurden landwirtschaftliche Kollektivbetriebe aufgelöst und Land, Vieh und Infrastruktur in Form privater Eigentumsrechte an ländliche Haushalte verteilt. Heute jedoch ist ländliche Armut nach wie vor weit verbreitet, und es bestehen grosse Disparitäten zwischen Arm und Reich. Um die gegenwärtige Situation und die Entwicklung seit den späten Achtzigern zu untersuchen, bedient sich diese Studie einer 'Livelihoods'-Perspektive. Sie analysiert die wechselseitige Beziehung zwischen verschiedenen, für die agro-pastorale Produktion relevanten Akteuren und ihrem institutionellen Umfeld. Dazu greift die Studie unter anderem auf Erkenntnisse der Neuen Institutionenökonomie, der Verfügungsrechtstheorie sowie des Rechtspluralismus' zurück. Die empirischen Daten wurden während insgesamt 10 Monaten zwischen 2006 und 2009 in zwei Dörfern im Naryn *oblast* (Provinz) erhoben. Dabei wurden sowohl quantitative als auch qualitative Erhebungsmethoden angewandt, u.a. eine Haushaltsvollerhebung sowie halbstrukturierte Interviews mit Angehörigen lokaler Haushalte und Repräsentanten staatlicher und nichtstaatlicher Institutionen und Organisationen.

Ein erster Schwerpunkt der Studie liegt auf der gegenwärtigen Ausprägung und dem Entstehen sozioökonomischer Disparitäten auf der Lokalebene. Die Ergebnisse der Haushaltsbefragung belegen grosse Unterschiede zwischen Haushalten bezüglich dem Eigentum von Vieh, einem in Kirgistan gängigen lokalen Wohlstandsindikator. Während zahlreiche Haushalte gar keine oder nur sehr wenige eigene Tiere haben, verfügen einige wenige Haushalte über sehr grosse Herden. Die Untersuchung zeigt jedoch, dass solche Disparitäten nicht gänzlich neu sind und bereits in sozialistischer Zeit existierten. Das sowjetische Prinzip der rationellen Zuteilung von Gütern und Ressourcen erlaubte es ländlichen Eliten, mehr Reichtum als andere zu akkumulieren. Gleichzeitig aber sicherten halb- bis illegale Gütertransfers zwischen Staats- und Privatwirtschaft das Überleben der breiten Bevölkerung. Durch die rasche Privatisierung der Landwirtschaft nach 1991 wurden die bestehenden Disparitäten jedoch weiter verstärkt. Gründe dafür sind unter anderem die wichtige Rolle ländlicher Eliten bei der Auflösung der Kolchosen und die daraus resultierende Ungleichbehandlung lokaler Haushalte bei der Verteilung von Produktionsmitteln; eine fehlende Kontrolle lokaler Verteilprozesse durch übergeordnete Instanzen; Gesetzesreformen, welche mit lokalen Entwicklungen nur selten Schritt halten konnten; sowie eine schlecht vorbereitete

Privatisierung des Viehbestand, welche zum Tod Tausender Tiere durch Krankheit und Mangelernährung führte. Zudem fehlte vielen ehemaligen einfachen Kolchos-Arbeitern und Arbeiterinnen die notwendige Erfahrung, um einen eigenen, marktorientierten landwirtschaftlichen Kleinbetrieb zu führen. Die Privatisierung der kirgisischen Landwirtschaft fand damit in einem sogenannt hybriden institutionellen Kontext statt: statt einer fairen Güter-*Verteilung* als Ausgangspunkt zur Schaffung eines freien Marktes handelte es sich vielmehr um eine auf den Netzwerken aus sozialistischer Zeit basierende Ressourcen-*Zuteilung*.

Der zweite Schwerpunkt der Studie liegt auf den verschiedenen Akteuren, ihren Praktiken sowie relevanten Organisationen und Institutionen im Kontext der agropastoralen Produktion. Dabei wird untersucht, wie Verfügungsrechte über Kulturland, Vieh und Weiden verhandelt, verteidigt und genutzt werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass privates Landeigentum für ländliche Haushalte einerseits von wirtschaftlichem und symbolischem Wert ist und damit auch einen gewissen Grad an Sicherheit vermitteln kann. Andererseits bedingen Landeigentum und -nutzung auch neue Verpflichtungen – wie etwa Gebühren für Bewässerung oder Steuern auf Kulturland – und sind damit eng mit monetären Austauschbeziehungen verbunden. Dies stellt vor allem weniger begüterte Haushalte vor grosse Probleme, die nur selten Zugang zu Lohnarbeit und somit Bargeld finden. Damit zeigt sich, dass sich das marktwirtschaftliche Prinzip privater landwirtschaftlicher Unternehmer in Kirgistan noch immer nicht vollumfänglich durchgesetzt hat. Stattdessen ist die Ressource Kulturland für viele Haushalte zur Bürde geworden. Dies erklärt, warum ein Grossteil des Landes heute nicht mehr für landwirtschaftliche Produktion genutzt wird. Bezüglich der Viehwirtschaft zeigt sich, dass Tiere nicht nur eine wichtige finanzielle Ressource darstellen, welche bei Bedarf in Geld umgewandelt werden kann, sondern auch zentraler Dreh- und Angelpunkt für die Reproduktion sozialer Beziehungen sind. Wohlstand in der Form von Vieh ist oft gleichbedeutend mit Verhandlungsmacht über Ressourcen und bestimmt damit auch über den Zugang zu Weideressourcen. Dabei können wohlhabendere Haushalte oft vom Nebeneinander verschiedener, mehr oder weniger formaler Regeln und Normen profitieren. Je nach Absicht berufen sie sich entweder auf staatliche Gesetze oder informelle Regeln und Verhaltensweisen, oder sie kombinieren beides miteinander. Weniger wohlhabende Haushalte hingegen kennen sich mit formalen Regeln oft nur ungenügend aus, oder es fehlen ihnen die Mittel, sie je nachdem zu nutzen oder aber erfolgreich zu umgehen.

Die Neudefinition von Verfügungsrechten durch die Kirgisischen Agrarreformen hat damit nicht nur den Marktwert natürlicher Ressourcen, sondern auch die längerfristigen Aussichten ländlicher Haushalte sowie die Beziehungen zwischen Arm und Reich grundlegend verändert. Ländliche Lebenswelten und soziale Beziehungen werden heute massgeblich durch einen Markt geprägt, der insgesamt nur sehr schwach reguliert ist. In der Folge gelingt es wohlhabenden, handlungsmächtigen Akteuren meist, ihre Verfügungsrechte über Ressourcen auszuweiten, während sich weniger Wohlhabende mit verschiedenen Aspekten von Unsicherheit konfrontiert sehen. Dies schmälert längerfristig ihre Aussichten, der Armutsfalle zu entrinnen. Es ist daher wahrscheinlich, dass sich die bestehenden sozioökonomischen Disparitäten im ländlichen Kirgistan weiter verschärfen werden. Die langfristigen Auswirkungen der landwirtschaftlichen Reformen zeigen damit deutlich, dass die Einführung neuer Gesetze und die Reform lokaler und regionaler Institutionen und Organisationen nur mit grosser Vorsicht geschehen sollte und ein detailliertes Verständnis der Prozesse, welche lokalen Disparitäten zugrunde liegen, erfordert. Vermeintlich ‘mächtige’ Gesetze und ‘robuste’ Institutionen laufen ansonsten Gefahr, den bereits beträchtlichen Graben zwischen Arm und Reich weiter zu vertiefen.

1 Introduction

"Understanding agrarian structures requires (…) asking the basic questions: who owns what, who does what, who gets what and what do they do with it? Social relations inevitably govern the distribution of property (including land), patterns of work and division of labour, the distribution of income and the dynamics of consumption and accumulation."

(Scoones 2009, 186)

In late summer 2008, towards the end of my empirical field research for this thesis, I came across a village's alpine summer pastures that had been affected by a mining company starting to dig for gold, silver and other precious metals. Local herders told me that the *kombinat*, as they called it, had opened in 2006 and since then had constantly expanded the area of the open-cast mine. Many herders bitterly complained that the mine would not only spoil their village's drinking water, but also destroy "their" pastures, i.e. the alpine meadows where they kept their animals during summer. Obviously, the mine severely limited local people's future prospects to make a living from animal husbandry. Therefore, I at first considered the situation to be a clear-cut conflict over land resources between local and external actors, between inherited ways of pastoral production and the growing extraction industry.

However, it soon turned out that the situation was more complex than I had initially thought. I learnt that since spring 2008, about 70 people from the nearby village had taken paid employment in the mine. Among them were not only rich and poor people, but also many herders who worked in 15-day shifts and 'commuted' between their family's summer camp and the mining compound, which were sometimes only a few hundred metres apart. I also learnt that about half of the herding families on the nearby pastures regularly sold yogurt, milk and meat to the mining company in return for either cash or electricity. This puzzled me. What is it, I wondered, that makes people adopt two different income-generating activities if they know that these activities directly conflict with each other? Why do they accept precarious working conditions – the *kombinat* did not offer any working contracts – to dig up their summer pastures, a resource so praised by the Kyrgyz people and so crucial to the maintenance of animal husbandry, which has been one of the pillars of people's livelihoods in rural Kyrgyzstan for hundreds of years?

Unfortunately, I only encountered this intriguing case towards the end of my empirical field research, and time ran out to examine it in every detail. The simple answer to my questions, of course, was that the *kombinat* offers very attractive salaries that by far exceed local and regional standards. However, when I analyzed in more detail the empirical data I had collected in the two years prior to the 'mining case', I eventually realized that this was about more than just money. Instead, the case turned out to reflect the very issues which are the focus of this thesis.

1.1 Aims of the study and research questions

Focusing on agro-pastoral livelihoods and processes of institutional change in rural Kyrgyzstan, the present study examines the recursive relationship between actors and institutions that shapes transformation. It explores the interplay between concrete livelihood realities and the wider institutional context with which agro-pastoral households in rural Kyrgyzstan must cope to make a living in an ongoing process of post-socialist transformation.

The first objective of this thesis is to examine current agro-pastoral livelihoods in rural Kyrgyzstan and related processes of change, i.e. how households and individuals make a living today and how they have coped with processes of post-socialist transformation since the late 1980s. To do so, I adopt a livelihoods perspective and use the notion of *livelihood trajectories* to account for the historical perspective (Scoones 1998; de Haan and Zoomers 2005). As a second objective, the study examines the institutional and organizational context in which rural livelihoods were and are embedded, again focussing both on the current situation as well as on processes of institutional transformation since the late socialist period (Nuijten 1999; Appendini and Nuijten 2002). The analysis of the recursive relationship between these processes of institutional change and actors' livelihoods trajectories forms the third objective of the thesis.

I base my study on the assumption that the last 20 years of post-socialist change have fostered socioeconomic disparities in rural Kyrgyzstan, and that today, the local institutional and organizational context is characterized by a complex interplay of formal and informal, state and non-state, socialist and post-socialist structures, procedures and practices. I also assume that, to a considerable degree, people's ability to make use of certain institutions and organizations – and thus to access certain resources – is governed by these socioeconomic disparities. The following are the specific research questions of the study:

- How do rural Kyrgyz households make a living today? What socioeconomic disparities exist between them? How can these livelihoods be categorized?
- How have these rural livelihoods changed since the late socialist period? How did households and individuals cope with the privatization process in the 1990s?

- Which institutions and organizations are relevant for rural livelihoods today?
- How have these institutions and organizations changed since the late socialist period?

- How do rural livelihoods and the local institutional and organizational context influence each other? How does the latter support or hinder people from making a living? And how does people's agency contribute to processes of institutional change?
- How has this interplay changed since the late socialist period?

My analysis builds on field research over a total of 10 months in Naryn *oblast* (province) in Central Kyrgyzstan. The evidence I present comes from two case study villages I visited on numerous occasions between 2006 and 2008. Due to the lack of reliable statistical data for the village and the household level, I have combined quantitative and qualitative methods, i.e. a household survey; semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives of numerous local households, state representatives from the local up to the national level, and others; participant observation and focus group discussions.

By exploring the interlinkages between livelihood dynamics and processes of institutional transformation, this study addresses an important gap in the understanding of post-socialist transformation which – particularly in the case of rural Kyrgyzstan – has rarely been looked at up till now[1].

[1] A gap which seems all the more relevant in view of ongoing efforts by various donor agencies to 'build and strengthen' institutions in the Kyrgyz countryside (cf. World Bank 2008).

1.2 From 'transitology' to 'transformation' research

Over the last two decades, academic and policy-oriented debates on development in post-socialist societies and economies have taken several turns, and have thrown up starkly contrasting approaches to conceptualizing 'transition' or 'transformation'[2]. The early 1990s were dominated by economic, relatively functionalist approaches informed by the neoliberal principles of the Washington Consensus. Advocates of the Consensus – under the guidance of the leading International Financial Institutions (IFI) such as the World Bank and the IMF, and thus with considerable influence on many governments in the post-socialist space – considered 'transition' a rapid and linear process of change from the inefficient socialist economy towards efficient modern market capitalism, which should "get under way within two years or so (…)" (IMF, IBRD, OECD, EBRD 1990; cit. in Abazov 1999, 199). The tools proposed to bring about this change were mainly economic policy measures, including rapid privatization of state assets, liberalization of prices and deregulation of markets. Economic growth was declared the main indicator for measuring the progress of transition (World Bank 1996; Kolodko 1999; Eisen 2001; Pender 2001; Rose 2009; Pickles 2010).

Revising the Washington Consensus

However, things went seriously wrong. By the mid-1990s it became obvious that many countries whose governments had followed the World Bank's 'blueprint for reform' experienced the fastest rates of poverty increase worldwide and that socioeconomic disparities had worsened rapidly. Also the expected spillover effects between economies and societies actually hardly ever occured. In short, transition did not progress as predicted. Consequently, and in response to the increasing criticism of neoliberal policies worldwide, the IFIs began to revise their stance on economic primacy for development, taking into account recent insights from New Institutional Economics on the role of institutions in the economy (Gelb 1997; Stiglitz 1998; Wolfensohn 1998). This eventually resulted in a new, comprehensive approach to development which became known as the Post-Washington Consensus. It acknowledged the role of social, political, environmental and cultural aspects in development (Carothers 2002; World Bank 2005).

Although it had far-reaching consequences for reform policies in many transition countries, the new paradigm was less 'post' than it appeared. On the one hand, the IFIs did not abandon the modernist, binary logic of post-socialist transition as a linear process from socialism towards free market capitalism, which remained the final objective of all their policy recommendations. On the other hand, the approach was still functionalist in the sense that it considered 'institution building' to be a matter of replacing old, socialist institutions with more efficient ones. In other words, the new perspective was more about finding more elaborate tools to get the process 'back on track' rather than about scrutinizing the modernist assumptions behind the transition paradigm (Lines 1998; Hann 2006). Thus, the Post-Washington Consensus also offered little help to better understand and explain the multitude of development processes in the post-socialist space and their ostensible 'deviations' from the predicted linear transition path.

'Transformation': alternative approaches

However, the weakening of the neoliberal hegemony eventually gave way to alternative approaches to post-socialist development and to a more fundamental criticism of the transition paradigm. In essence, the criticism, which mainly emerged from the social sciences and critical development studies, focused on the paradigm's normative

[2] In this thesis, the term 'transition' is mainly used in regard to post-socialist reforms and the macroeconomic perspective, while 'transformation' is used in connection with local-level processes and the ethnographic perspective. For more details on the conceptual differences between the two terms, see 2.2.1.

character, i.e. its orientation towards the outcome rather than the course of the transition process, and challenged its emphasis on the two sole factors markets and institutions (Hopfmann 1997; Smith and Pickles 1998; Buraywoy and Verdery 1999; Müller 2001; Scoones 2009). Instead, the various new approaches built on the idea of 'transformation' as a bundle of evolutionary, multi-directional and open-ended processes, in which actors recombine and improvise on the old and the new in order to cope with the numerous challenges 'transition' poses. Consequently, many of these scholars have refrained from crafting a 'theory of transition', seeking instead mid-range concepts that allow them to adequately describe and explain the apparent diversity of transformation processes at various levels (cf. Stark and Bruszt 2001; Pavlinek 2003). Drawing on advances in, among others, new institutional economics, property rights theory and legal pluralism, these concepts include ideas of path-dependency (cf. Verdery 1991; Altvater 1998) simultaneous development (cf. Offe 1994; Stark 1992), hybridity (cf. Koehler and Zürcher 2004; Lindner and Moser 2009), institutional bricolage (cf. Cleaver 2001), and uncertainty (cf. Mehta et al. 1999, 2001; Kandiyoti 2002; Herbers 2006b; see 2.2.2 for details).

These alternative approaches promoted a shift away from the previous macroeconomic focus towards multi-level analysis, and particularly emphasized actor research at the micro level. As a consequence, the noughties have witnessed a rise in ethnographic transformation research, which has led to a better understanding of local responses to the socialist collapse and the national transition policies after 1991. Meanwhile, there is a wide array of excellent studies available on the local aspects of transformation, especially for Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Smith and Pickles 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Hann 2006) as well as for Russia (cf. Hann 2002; Lindner 2008, Ries 2009). Since a profound review of this rich and extremely diverse literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, I shall focus on the state of the art of research on livelihoods, agrarian change and pastoralism in rural Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia[3].

1.3 Transformation research in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia

The early dominance of the macro-economic perspective and the subsequent rise of multi-level and ethnographic analyses is also reflected in the existing literature on Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia[4]. Early contributions to the transition process focused on the effects of the Kyrygz reform policies on agricultural production and commodity markets and were concerned with policy adjustments to foster economic growth (Duncan 1994; Bloch et al. 1996; Delehanty and Rasmussen 1996; Lerman 2000, 2003)[5]. Early concerns about the social costs of reforms – in the form of extreme inflation and rapid rural pauperization – were raised soon after, when the interim outcomes of the Kyrgyz 'shock therapy' could be compared to the situation in neighboring republics (cf. Spoor 1997, 1999; Abazov 1999). However, most of these and subsequent similar studies remained at the macro level and relied primarily on analysis of statistical data and legal documents (cf. Kadyrkulov and Kanchayev 2000; Tashmatov et al. 2000; Trouchine and Zitzmann 2005; Christensen and Pomfret 2007; Peyrouse 2009).

The institutional perspective

Other authors, however, sought to verify their concerns about the reforms' outcomes empirically through local-level studies. Most of these studies focused on the

[3] There is also an important body of research available in Russian on the topic which is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.
[4] Lindner (2008, 3f) observes the same for the Russian context.
[5] In addition, the World Bank, various UN and bilateral donor agencies, and the Kyrgyz Government have published countless reports and assessments on agrarian sector reforms. Unless they are of direct relevance to this thesis, these will not explicitly be mentioned.

consequences of land reforms for the rural population, highlighting problems of equal access to land and agrarian markets (Mearns 1996; Spoor 1999, 2004; Giovarelli 1998; Childress et al. 2003; Jones 2003; Bruce et al. 2006). With the increased attention of the government to administrative reforms in the late nineties, issues of local governance also came to the fore. Most authors raised concerns about the effectiveness of the Kyrgyz decentralization program and noted the general absence of a 'civil society' (Anderson 2000; Geiss 2002; Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003; TACIS 2005; Libman 2008; Ibraimova 2009). Others examined how the public services sector coped with the challenges of rural transition, including education (Rufer and Wälty 2001; de Young et al. 2006) and health care (cf. Meimanaliev et al. 2005).

The growing attention to rural organizations and institutions also generated increased interest in the legacy of socialist structures, i.e. how collective and state farms modified the rural social contract. While Verdery (1991) emphasized the importance of the historical perspective for post-socialist studies in general at an early stage, Mearns (1996) was one of the first to highlight the continued influence of former Soviet hierarchies on Central Asian rural societies. However, while he considered the persistence of socialist power structures a major obstacle to successful reforms, Roy (1999) argued for a less prejudiced view of the socialist legacy, whose structures often provided minimum social safeguards for the rural poor. Either way, later contributions from the Uzbek (cf. Trevisani 2007) or the Russian context (cf. Lindner 2008) confirmed the continuing importance of the Soviet legacy to processes of institutional and social transformation in postsocialism.

The livelihoods perspective

From the late 1990s on, the theme of local livelihood dynamics at household and individual level became increasingly popular in publications. While first household studies carried out in the early years of independence had focused on identifying different sets of coping responses (cf. Howell 1996, 1998; later on also Mearns 2004; Ronsijn 2006; Shigaeva et al. 2007), academic interest soon shifted to particular livelihood aspects, such as the role of social networks (Werner 1998; Kuehnast 2000; Kuehnast and Dudwick 2004; Sabates-Wheeler 2004), land use practices (cf. Garn 2002; Eriksson 2006; Herbers 2006a,b) or particular livelihood alternatives such as labor migration (Rohner 2006; Thieme 2008b; Schmidt and Sagynbekova 2008; Schoch 2008). With the aim of assessing the micro-level effects of the Kyrgyz privatization and decentralization programs, ethnographic studies also increasingly scrutinized the new property regimes in agriculture, raising critical thoughts about new private and common property regimes alike (cf. Behnke 2003; Bichsel 2006; Sehring 2007; Larue 2008; Bichsel et al. 2010; Robinson et al. 2010).

One of the dominant topics which somehow cuts across most of these issues is pastoralism, i.e. animal husbandry and the use of pastures, which is an essential constituent of livelihoods throughout rural Central Asia and a key concern of this study.

1.4 The discourse of pastoral transformation in Central Asia

There has been vigorous academic interest in animal husbandry and (agro-)pastoralism over the last decades. Towards the turn of the century, mobile animal husbandry has gained increased attention as a particular form of adaptation to the effects of climate change, such as droughts and desertification (cf. Behnke and Scoones 1992; Scholz 1997; Davies et al. 2010). Until the early 1990s, most of this research focused on the African (cf. Scoones 1995; Little et al. 2001; Hesse and MacGregor 2006; Homewood 2008) and South Asian contexts (cf. Ehlers and Kreutzmann 2000; Kreutzmann 2004), while only a few studies explicitly dealt with pastoral production in Soviet Central Asia

(cf. Dienes 1975)[6]. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, other regions with a rich pastoral tradition, such as Northern Siberia, the Altai, Mongolia, and Central Asia, caught the attention of Western scholars. There is now a rich body of literature about the different forms of mobile animal husbandry in the region, their adaptation processes to constantly changing political, economic and environmental conditions, and their environmental and social consequences.

Curtailed mobility

The recent alteration of mobility patterns is a recurring theme in these publications. Most scholars observe a massive reduction of mobility among pastoralists after 1991, which is mainly ascribed to the privatization of livestock and the disbandment of large organizational structures, as in Mongolia (Humphrey and Sneath 1999), Kazakhstan (Kerven 2003a; Kerven et al. 2003) or Kyrgyzstan (van Veen 1995; Wilson 1997; Jacquesson 2003; Ludi 2003, 2004; Farrington 2005; Undeland 2005). In regions where no radical agrarian reforms have taken place, such as in Xinjiang, processes of sedentarization are seen as an important cause of the reduction in flock mobility (Kreutzmann 1995, 2009).

Environmental consequences

A large proportion of publications are devoted to the environmental consequences of this reduced pastoral mobility. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that the termination of the highly intensified socialist livestock production, which caused severe overgrazing of all types of pastures, had positive effects (Wilson 1997; Jacquesson 2003; Undeland 2005). On the other hand, however, most authors observe that the reduced mobility caused new forms of rangeland degradation, mainly through over-utilization of pastures close to settlements and under-utilization of remote summer pastures (Fitzherbert 2000; Ellis and Lee 2003; SDC 2009). This again lowers the overall level of nutrition for animals, which leads to a further decrease in livestock productivity (Wright et al. 2003). Therefore, the academic discourse by and large argues in favor of a return to former migration patterns, acknowledging mobile pastoralism as a highly adaptive and productive form of livelihood.

Transforming the pastoral commons

Other scholars have focused their attention more on organizational and institutional aspects of pastoral economies. While the consequences of legal reforms to agro-pastoral production have been widely discussed in most countries (for Kyrgyzstan, see Childress et al. 2003; Undeland 2005), the role of informal, non-state institutions and organizations has rarely been examined thus far. The exception is Mongolia, where a series of studies on processes of institutional transformation within the pastoral commons revealed that the withdrawal of the state led to a weakening of formal institutions, while at the same time informal institutions re-emerged. Finke (2004), however, finds that the latter are often too weak to 'close the gap'; this eventually increases transaction costs and uncertainty among local herders. Instead, people refer to a variety of customary (or traditional) rules and norms concerning the use of pastures, which increase uncertainty about the behavior of others (Upton 2005). In such a situation, wealthier herders often have better opportunities to secure their access to pastures and other resources than less wealthy ones (Mearns 2002; Kerven et al. 2003). In a search for new ways to regulate the Mongolian pastoral commons, Fernández-Gimenez (2002) challenges the need for a rigid definition of formal property rights as new institutional economics has suggested. Instead, she argues for flexible institutional regulations that build on reciprocity among actors and allow for mobility since, for many pastoralists, resource access would be more important than tenure security. An altered balance between the formal and the informal is also noted by Meierhans (2008), who observes a considerable gap between Kyrygz herders' and

[6] There are, however, numerous studies of the Soviet livestock sector as a whole (cf. Newth 1962; Jasny 1964)

scientists' knowledge and practices regarding the management of pastures (see also Liechti and Biber-Klemm 2008).

Agro-pastoral livelihoods

The growing number of livelihood studies has further improved the understanding of the effect of transformation on agro-pastoral societies. On the one hand, evidence suggests that rural people increasingly depend on land and livestock for their survival (cf. Liechti 2008). On the other hand, the increasing social stratification and loss of mutual trust and aid among rural households creates a situation where most people prefer to work on their own and distance themselves from new forms of cooperation. Although they deploy a wide range of coping responses, rural producers hardly ever cooperate with people outside their household and immediate kin (Finke 2004; Farrington 2005). A related concern is that many of them continuously fail to enter rural commodity markets and to develop their livelihoods beyond mere subsistence production. Although the possibility of using common pasture resources for private livestock production is seen as a competitive advantage (Kreutzmann 1995), research has identified several issues hampering the development of a solid value chain for livestock products, including remoteness, poor raw material quality, absence of disease controls, insufficient price information, and generally weak demand (Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Ajibekov 2005; Näscher 2009; SDC 2009). Recent studies increasingly scrutinize gender aspects of pastoral agro-production, either in terms of women's difficult access to livestock and related resources (Undeland 2008), or in terms of women's increased domestic workload when their husbands and sons migrate for labor (cf. Schoch 2008; Schoch et al. forthcoming).

The present study takes up this discourse of pastoral transformation in Central Asia and combines it with alternative approaches to processes of post-socialist transformation and a focus on livelihoods and institutions. By emphasizing the recursive relationship between actors and institutions, the study will contribute to a better understanding of ongoing processes of socioeconomic change in rural Kyrgyzstan.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is composed of twelve chapters divided in three parts. **Part A** (chapters 2 to 4) is concerned with different theoretical and methodological approaches to transformation and gives an overview of the Kyrgyz transition politics after 1991. **Chapter 2** introduces the theoretical approach of the study with reference to ongoing discourses of post-socialist 'transition' and 'transformation'. It develops a conceptual framework for the analysis of actors and institutions in transformation. Building on that, **Chapter 3** introduces the research methodology and reflects on the practice of participatory, actor-oriented research for the study of post-socialist transformation. **Chapter 4** then outlines political and economic reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic. It starts from the late socialist period and focuses on the two main guiding principles of the Kyrgyz reform agenda, i.e. privatization and decentralization.

Part B (chapters 5 to 8) builds on empirical evidence to examine the persistence of old, and the emergence of new, socioeconomic disparities in rural Kyrgyzstan. Based on the results of a quantitative household survey carried out in spring 2007, **chapter 5** develops a household typology to describe current socioeconomic disparities in the two case study villages. Asking the question whether such disparities existed in the socialist economy already, **Chapter 6** examines the 'modes of operation' of the two collective farms and how they affected people's livelihoods in the Soviet period. **Chapter 7** then deals with the 'heyday of transition' between 1991 and the early noughties. It examines how the two collective farms were dissolved, how people were invested with new

claims over land, livestock and infrastructure, and whether and how the distribution process influenced the reproduction of existing, as well as the emergence of new, disparities. **Chapter 8** summarizes Part B and relates its main findings to the theoretical concepts used in this study.

Part C (Chapters 9 to 11) also builds on empirical evidence to examine actors, practices, organizations and institutions around agropastoral livelihoods. It asks what local actors do with the different resources they received during the privatization program. **Chapter 9** focuses on the actors, practices, organizations and institutions involved in the use of arable land. It asks how people access land and other production factors such as water for irrigation, workforce and cash, and examines the role of agrarian commodity markets for rural livelihoods. **Chapter 10** follows a similar approach in regard to livestock and pastures. It explains the social and economic significance of livestock for rural livelihoods and examines how people access and use pastures in the current institutional and organizational context. **Chapter 11** summarizes the main findings of Part C and relates them to the theoretical concepts used in this study.

Chapter 12 concludes the study. It refers to the mining case presented at the very beginning of this chapter, summarizes the main findings and discusses them with regard to the ongoing transformation discourse and in relation to the various concepts used to record post-socialist transformation at the micro level.

Part A
Post-socialism: politics of transition and approaches to transformation

2 From 'transitology' to the study of processes of post-socialist transformation

"Spread the truth – the laws of economics are like the laws of engineering. One set of laws works everywhere."

Lawrence Summers, World Bank chief economist, 1991
(cit. in Rose 2009, 2)

"Why then has transition been so difficult?"

(Gelb 1997, 451)

Kyrgyzstan was one of the first countries in the Former Soviet Union to adopt a neoliberal reform agenda put forward by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other International Financial Institutions. As a consequence, Kyrgyzstan's economic, political and social development after 1991 became closely associated with the market-oriented concepts that dominated the discourse of post-socialist transition in the early 1990s. In order to achieve rapid economic growth, reformers were thus mainly concerned with liberalizing prices, privatizing state property and decentralizing the state administration. By the mid-nineties, however, it became obvious that most predictions regarding post-socialist transition had failed. Neither had the free market really gained ground, nor had post-socialist societies necessarily become more equal and free, and the neoliberal reformers had to admit that they had underestimated the complexity of post-socialist transition. Considering the advances made by New Institutional Economics regarding the importance of institutions for economic development, the World Bank and its allies eventually adjusted their development paradigm – at a time, however, when the most valuable resources in rural Kyrgyzstan had already been distributed or appropriated (cf. chapter 4). This is why section 2.1 gives due attention to the leading paradigm behind early transition policy.

The failure of the neoliberal transition paradigm also paved the way for a broader, more critical academic debate of post-socialist transition. In order to explain the multitude of development processes observed in the post-socialist space, early critics addressed the lack of adequate theoretical explanations for the socialist collapse and its consequences. They argued that a better understanding of the recursive relationship between actors and institutions was needed in order to grasp 'processes of transformation' (instead of transition). This also entailed a shift of focus from macroeconomics to processes of structuration at the micro level. Section 2.2 shows that while these critical approaches have not (yet) developed into a comprehensive 'theory of transition', they have led to a more differentiated understanding of the multiple *processes of transformation*.

This thesis builds to a great extent on the insights achieved by the transition line of critique. Therefore, the second half of this chapter revisits this critique's underlying theoretical concepts regarding the linkages between structure and agency. Section 2.3 explores institutional and property rights theory and eventually puts forward a conceptual framework for the analysis of organizations, institutions and organizing practices in transformation. Section 2.4 refers to actor-oriented approaches in development research in order to bring forward an analytical approach that makes it possible to examine people's diverse and path-dependent responses and contributions to processes of post-socialist transformation.

2.1 'Transitology' and the neoliberal opinion leaders of the 1990s

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 came as a surprise to many observers – and made a strong case for neoliberal thinking. In conjunction with the so-called 'third wave of democracy', referring to the end of military dictatorship in Latin America in the 1980s and of authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe, the unprecedented events in the East soon led Western policymakers to conclude that socialism, the state-planned economy and 'collectivist' property institutions had utterly failed. Hence, they argued, the model of democracy, free market economy and private property had finally prevailed (Rufer and Wälty 2001; Carothers 2002; Beyer 2006; Hann 2006; Pickles 2010).

2.1.1 Economy matters! 'Transition' and the Washington Consensus

In this situation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), along with regional development banks, took the lead 'to develop' the former socialist world. To this purpose, they deployed their proven 1980s recipes, suggesting rapid reforms towards a free market economy (Rufer and Wälty 2001, 652). The Bretton Woods institutions based their arguments on their successful tackling of the international debt crisis of the 1980s, through which they had contributed to global economic recovery. At the time, neoliberal exponents such as Jeffrey Sachs and IMF chief economist Stanley Fischer had rapidly tackled Bolivian and Israeli hyperinflation by deploying a so-called economic 'shock therapy' based on the three pillars of price liberalization, stabilization and privatization. This portfolio of economic policy interventions developed by the World Bank, the IMF and other Washington-based policy advisors became known as the 'Washington Consensus' (Lines 1998, 2). In 1990, IMF advisor John Williamson outlined the Consensus' key policy prescriptions as follows (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 The Washington Consensus' key policy prescriptions (Williamson 1997, cit. in Kolodko 1999, 237)

1) Fiscal discipline	Keep the budget deficit small
2) Public expenditure	Redirect public expenditure toward neglected fields with high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution
3) Tax reform	Broaden the tax base and cut marginal tax rates
4) Financial liberalization	Let the market determine interest rates
5) Exchange rates	Foster exports by unified exchange rates between countries
6) Trade liberalization	Replace quantitative trade restrictions by progressively reduced tariffs
7) Foreign direct investment	Abolish barriers that impede the entry of foreign firms
8) Privatization	Privatize state enterprises
9) Deregulation	Abolish regulations that impede the entry of new firms or that restrict competition
10) Property rights	Provide secure property rights

The objective of these purely economic-policy-based prescriptions could be summarized as rapid and sustained economic growth based on maximized private property, a liberalized market and a minimized role for the state. This objective has

been articulated repeatedly by the World Bank, the IMF and related policy-thinkers since the early 1980s. Economic growth, measured by per capita gross domestic product (GDP), thus became the main indicator for measuring the success of the Washington Consensus (Pender 2001, 398; Kolodko 1999, 236).

Pro-market, anti-state

The explicit focus on economic growth made the market appear as a meta institution paving the ground for development in general: "Without a faster rate of production increase, other objectives cannot be achieved (…)" (World Bank 1981, cit. in Pender 2001, 398). So-called 'transitologists' were convinced that a liberalized economy would promote democracy through spillover effects and that a country moving away from dictatorship was automatically in transition to democracy (Müller 2001, 6; Carothers 2002, 6ff; Pickles 2010, 129f). Democracy building and state building were seen as mutually reinforcing, i.e. state institutions were automatically strengthened by strengthening democracy. As a result, the Washington Consensus aimed to reduce the role of the state to a minimum by promoting privatization, price liberalization and deregulation – a policy directly challenging political reality in most developing countries and all the states of the Former Soviet Union. In practice, the provision of 'secure property rights' thus meant the predominance of private property over collective property; the proponents of neoliberalism usually referred to Garrett Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' (1968) and related it to the failed state economy (Hann 2006).

'One-world consensus'

In principle, the World Bank and the IMF argued that the newly independent states of the Former Soviet Union would face the same structural problems as other countries in the Third World. Opening up their economies, adjusting prices and reducing state intervention would therefore be the right recipe for them (Lines 1998, 4). Thus, the Washington Consensus' reform experiences from Latin America were transferred to post-socialist transition countries (Kolodko 1999, 236). In the sense of a "one-world consensus" (Müller 2001, 6), each national economy was treated "as part of the global economy [and] structural adjustment programmes [were] similar in all parts of the world." (Altvater 1998, 595)

Binary logic of transition: informed by modernization theory

The Washington Consensus was informed by modernization theory and based on a binary logic. Transition was therefore understood as a linear development from one system to another, i.e. between the two "extremes of inefficient socialist systems and efficient modern market capitalism" (Altvater 1998, 592). From the very beginning, such thinking consequently ruled out the possibility of a 'third way' between socialism and capitalism (Altvater 1998, 592). The focus was on the process's destination and not its origin. In other words, transition was thought from where it should lead to, not where it came from. New structures had to be built on the ruins of the old, collapsed system. In this sense, the Consensus was "a package (…) aimed to dissolve the past by the fastest means possible" (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 5). Michael Burawoy (1992, cit. in Smith and Pickles 4) called this reworked modernization theory 'transitology'.

The logical consequence of this thinking was that every form of development that did not reach the defined objective of rapid economic growth had to be viewed as 'unsuccessful transition' or as an 'anomaly of transition' (Hopfmann 1997a, 44; Müller 2001, 7). Surprisingly however, hardly ever was it discussed where exactly – to what kind of 'free market economy' – the proposed reforms should lead (Rufer and Wälty 2001, 654). By the mid-1990s already, some 'transitologists' realized that this lack of a clear vision and the generally narrow conception of the transition process was problematic.

Speed of reforms: the 'all-out' approach as the only viable way

One of the few, at least partially debated, issues among the Bretton Woods representatives was the speed of reforms. In the 1996 World Development Report, the World Bank acknowledged that in principle there would be two possible ways of 'doing transition': a quick 'all-out' approach (often referred to as 'big bang' or shock therapy) versus a gradual approach (for which China was the favored example). Nevertheless, the Bank argued that the Former Soviet Republics had no other choice than to embark on the all-out approach. "The fact that there are two model routes from a planned economy to the market does not mean that all countries are in a position to choose between them. (…) [The] chaotic environment, combining a disintegrating economy with a rapidly weakening government, allowed no scope for gradual reform. For these countries the all-out approach was the only one available" (World Bank 1996, 10f). Jeffrey Sachs was one of the most popular advocates of the 'big bang' strategy. He argued that interdependencies between the different parts of an economy would make the implementation of a step-wise approach impossible, and that only a shock therapy was able to circumvent the expected resistance against reforms (Eisen 2001, 17; at the time, Sachs expected resistance mainly from within the administration, not from the general public). Others even insinuated that arguments in favor of a gradual approach would be of a political rather than a technical nature (Friedman 1989, cit. in Eisen 2001, 19). Ironically, the World Bank itself stressed that weak governments may cause problems for transition countries – the resulting need for institution building, however, was recognized only later on.

Conditionality and structural adjustment

As a matter of fact, poor countries – such as the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic – could not really choose the character of their reform program. They were in urgent need of foreign investment, which, by and large, came from the World Bank and the IMF. Yet these institutions linked their financial assistance to the implementation of the economic policy interventions recommended under the Washington Consensus (Pender 2001, 399). This concept of 'conditionality' – linking financial assistance and policy prescriptions through so-called Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) – was first introduced by Robert McNamara in 1979. It allowed the World Bank and the IMF to agressively promote its agenda and was thus one of the main reasons why the neoliberal development paradigm became so successful in many Former Soviet Republics. Unfortunately, it left little room for national governments to develop their own, locally adapted models of transition (Pender 2001, 399f).

2.1.2 Institutions matter! Critical reflection and advent of the 'Post-Washington Consensus'

The institutional economists' critique

Early criticism of the neoliberal transition largely built upon arguments from 'New Institutional Economics' (NIE; cf. also 2.3.1). Their most renowned representatives, Douglass North and Roland Coase, had emphasized the role of transaction costs and property rights for economic development even before the advent of the Washington Consensus and the socialist collapse. Their main argument was that development of markets always rests on a set of political and social institutions, and that the free market economy was not 'designed and implemented' within a few years, but grew historically over time (North 1991; Müller-Böker 2001). Consequently, NIE accused neoliberal concepts of neglecting institutional aspects, arguing that the implementation of a new economic order would, at least initially, have to acknowledge and make use of inherited structures in order to create sufficient legal and political certainty (Ellman 1997; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Thomi 2001). In contrast to most 'transitologists' who promoted an all-out approach and thought about adequate criteria to measure when transition was 'accomplished', institutional economists rather advocated a

gradual approach to post-socialist transition that would allow sufficient time for so-called 'institution building' (Kolodko 1999).

Since then, the idea that 'building' adequate institutions is crucial to make post-socialist transition work has constantly gained ground. Ellman (1997), for instance, outlined five 'surprises of transformation' to explain why the rebuilding of the post-socialist economy would take so much time. Besides pointing to unexpected developments in the banking and industrial sectors, he highlighted difficulties related to the transformation of institutions and the initial lack of attention paid to such processes by many economists (1997, 27). In a similar analysis, Dunford (1998, 107) identified a 'triple failure' of transition policy: "(…) first, to anticipate the impact of structural adjustment on economies that were not already market economies, second, to identify the nature of institutions on which capitalism depends and, third, to understand that modes of economic conduct taken for granted in capitalist societies have to be learned." And Lines (1998), stressing that the complexities of transition processes affect all levels of a society, argued for greater emphasis on building economic and democratic institutions in order to make transition work.

The World Development Report 1996: first concerns about the transition paradigm

While the World Bank and its partners had long ignored such objections, by the mid-nineties they could no longer ignore the fact that post-socialist transition was not going as they expected. In the World Development Report 1996 – an extensive review of the achievements of post-socialist transition – the World Bank had to admit that only in a few cases had the observed development in the post-socialist world met the initial expectations and predictions. Obviously, too many countries revealed certain 'anomalies of transition', which could not be made to match the neoliberal model of post-socialist transition any longer.

Five issues gave cause for serious concern. First, many countries which had initially adopted the reform prescriptions by the World Bank and the IMF – and the Kyrgyz Republic was one of them – did not implement the full range of suggested reforms (Rufer and Wälty 2001, 655). Second, many of these countries revealed the fastest rates of poverty increase worldwide and a rapid aggravation of socioeconomic disparities. Thus, instead of moving towards free market economies, many of them increasingly resembled Third World countries (Müller 2001, 7). Third, in the absence of functioning capital markets, privatizing state property turned out to be more difficult than initially expected and obviously fostered corruption and nepotism (World Bank 1996, 13; Rufer and Wälty 2001, 655). Fourth, the high hopes pinned on the economy as the driving force of transition, i.e. the expected spillover effects between a liberalized economy and democratic structures, had hardly materialized (Müller 2001, 8). Fifth, many Asian countries which had adopted a gradual instead of an 'all-out' approach, e.g. China and other Asian countries, seemed to be much more successful in their economic development (Müller 2001, 7).

In its first part, however, the World Development Report 1996 still represented mainstream thinking along the lines of the Washington Consensus doctrine, measuring transition against the usual indicators of economic growth, and ranking transition countries according to an 'economic liberalization index'. The report's somewhat disappointing conclusion was therefore that a few countries were on their way to a market economy, while the remaining majority still had a long way to go. Spoor (1997, 585) heavily criticized this simplistic dichotomy: "The collapse of the Soviet Union has affected all CAS [Central Asian States] in different ways, and various sets of policy reforms have been (and are being) implemented, whose effects cannot be captured within this simple dichotomy that is popular amongst the IFIs [International Financial Institutions]. The picture is indeed less clear than mainstream thought is suggesting (…)."

In its second part, however, the report outlined some major 'challenges of consolidation', indicating a certain change of attitude among IFI representatives towards the objections raised by institutional economists. The challenges included a

reconsideration of the role of governments (which had been widely neglected so far), the importance of long-term institution building, and the implications resulting from the insight that transition was a path-dependent process (World Bank 1996, 85ff).

Gelb, Wolfensohn, Stiglitz: open criticism of the Washington Consensus

In his 1997 article "Assessing the transition from plan to market: what have we learned about policies and economic theory?", Alan Gelb, the staff director of the 1996 World Development Report, further substantiated the Bank's growing self-criticism. First, Gelb admitted that the Washington Consensus' initial assumptions regarding transition may have been too simplistic and identified an urgent need to reform key institutions in transition countries. These included the legal framework, the banking system and the government itself, as well as mechanisms of social protection. He argued that institutions play a crucial role in economic development, which would explain why the market economy had not so far unleashed the large efficiency gains that had been expected. Second, Gelb admitted that "economies and people do respond to liberalizing reforms (…) even where the foundations of market systems are weak" (Gelb 1997, 451). It seemed that shock therapies did not anticipate any resistance to and reinterpretation of reforms, and that such responses came not only from within the administration but also from a wider audience. The third lesson revolved around the insight that the economic structure of a country at the outset of reforms played a decisive role in its further development. Although he was still arguing from a purely economic perspective, Gelb thus addressed the issue of path-dependency in transition (and in development in general). Last but not least, he also acknowledged that the success of any reform depended upon political circumstances, e.g. the struggles between reformist governments and the old socialist nomenclature.

In general, Gelb concluded that if transition were to serve more just than the national elites, broad reforms including social policies and institution building were necessary to tackle increasing poverty and inequality. He also brought the curtain down on the once so popular 'one-world consensus' by admitting that "economic policies are critically important, but they cannot simply be transferred between (…) starkly different countries" (ibid., 454). The 1996 World Development Report and Alan Gelb's subsequent article thus marked the beginning of a shift among IFIs away from the Washington Consensus towards what eventually became known as the 'Post-Washington Consensus'.

After a year of internal disputes over the Bank's overall strategy (Pender 2001, 406; Müller 2001, 10), in 1998 the then leaders of the World Bank, president James Wolfensohn and chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, openly admitted the "well-documented failures" (Stiglitz 1998, 1f) of the Washington Consensus. Up till then, the Bank had tended to explain a country's development shortcomings by pointing to insufficient implementation of the Bank's policy prescriptions by the respective government. Wolfensohn, Stiglitz and many others within the World Bank now began to criticize these prescriptions openly. In their opinion, the Bank's too narrow focus on the Washington Consensus' three pillars – price liberalization, stabilization and privatization – obscured perception of issues of distribution, competition and equality. Private property alone, they realized, was not a sufficient incentive to increase efficiency in production.

> "Too often we have focused too much on the economics, without a sufficient understanding of the social, the political, the environmental, and the cultural aspects of society. We have not thought adequately about the overall structure that is required in a country (…). Today, in the wake of crisis, we need a second framework." (Wolfensohn 1998, 12)

The market and the private sector had obviously failed in their role as the sole drivers of development. The Bank therefore enriched its vocabulary by developing the notions of *institutions*, *people*, *civil society* and *sustainability*, and started to pay greater attention to the organization of market structures and to the behavior of actors in transition economies. The focus now turned to organization, structure and a wider

range of actors, i.e. politics and practices of governance at different levels. (Kolodko 1999, 240)

The Post-Washington Consensus

Since the new approach towards development had to address all components of a society, the World Bank built its 'second framework' around the ideas of integration, ownership and participation. The need for development was now acknowledged not only for the private sector, but also for the public sector and thus at community, family and the individual level, where the sharp increase in poverty and inequality had to be addressed. Consequently, decentralization of decision-making processes and governance became a preferred strategy to empower these sub-national levels.

This shift towards a more comprehensive approach became known as the 'Post-Washington Consensus'. While the former consensus promoted the market as the meta-institution for development, the new consensus acknowledged issues of governance and policy as equally important to the economy. Highlighting the important role of existing institutions, the new consensus also represented a departure from the former 'no-preconditions' line (Carothers 2002, 16). In general, it encompassed a wider focus; an integrative character, considering social and institutional aspects not as externalities to, but as preconditions for functioning markets; and a long-term development perspective which replaced the former focus on rapid economic growth (Stiglitz 2005).

The 'Comprehensive Development Framework': new conditionalities

By 1999, the World Bank had translated its new approach into a new paradigm called the 'Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)' and in 2001 formally endorsed it as the basis for all of the Bank's activities. The CDF is based on four core principles: i) a long-term holistic vision that should help to balance structural, social, economic and financial issues; ii) country ownership, meaning that government, parliament, the private sector and civil society should take the lead in defining development objectives; iii) country-led partnerships to harmonize interventions with country-specific systems; and iv) a results focus to strengthen monitoring and evaluation at national level (World Bank 2005, 2). By prioritizing public sector interventions for poverty reduction, improving the performance of governments and administrations at all levels has become a key concern of the CDF. Consequently, the World Bank now makes a government's effort towards a 'good policy environment' a condition for further financial support ('good governance'). A government must prove its willingness to adopt pro-poor policies in a so-called 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)', which not only outlines the financial needs but also comprehensive policies for economic growth and poverty reduction. A government should thus be enabled to 'own' its country's development and forge partnerships through a national consultation process on the PRSP.

PRSPs have often been presented as a response to the Structural Adjustment Programs of the early 1990s, which had been widely criticized for their top-down mechanisms and their negligence of the social sector. "The CDF […] is not a blueprint. It is voluntary, and each country must decide on, and own, its priorities and programs" (Wolfensohn and Fischer 2005). Critics say however that such willingness has been limited. Financial assistance is only delivered on the basis of a PRSP. This in turn must build on CDF principles – which are defined by the World Bank. Thus, the new approach remains conditional in principle and thus restricts the CDF's claim of country ownership. In addition, as Pender (2001, 409) notes, the related discourse on what may be a 'good' or a 'bad' policy environment represented a step into "highly controversial political territory".

NIE should undoubtedly take the credit for having formulated the first widely received and policy-effective critique of the Washington Consensus. From the mid-1990s onwards, Western policy advisors increasingly acknowledged the important role of institutions for economic growth in general and post-socialist transition in particular.

This eventually led to the Post-Washington Consensus, which promotes a more comprehensive approach to development by dissociating itself from the former explicitly economic focus. In addition, the observed 'deviations' from the predicted transition path made the Bretton Woods institutions turn away from the former 'one-world consensus' and the insistence on an 'all-out' approach (compare section 2.1.1).

Nevertheless, the binary logic behind the transition paradigm, i.e. the conception of post-socialist transition as a linear shift from a state-controlled economy and a socialist society towards the free market and democracy, has never been challenged. The assumption remains that "if only the institutional conditions can be fulfilled (including well-functioning markets in all sectors and the 'rule of law'), then creating private owners in the only rational way to (…) promote development" (Hann 2006, 41). Thus, the new consensus is probably less 'Post-Washington' than it pretends to be. Instead, it is more about getting the tools and velocity right to reach the same pre-defined objective of maximum private property and rapid economic growth. Lines (1998, 7) gives a good example of the prevalence of modernist thinking and of a functionalist approach towards transition: "The central task involves the replacement of one set of social, political and economic institutions by another." Thus, the question of whether transition (or transformation) may be more than just a linear modernization process, what diverse outcomes it may produce, and whether socialist 'collective' property institutions may simply be 'replaced' by private property rights, has eventually been raised by others.

2.2 'There is no theory of transition': the sociological transition critique

Only a few observers developed alternative conceptions of post-socialist transition or voiced their concerns about the neoliberal transition paradigm before 1996 (among them Verdery 1991; or Brie 1995 and Gowan 1995, both cit. in Müller 2001). Smith and Pickles (1998, 4; emphasis in the original) relate this silence during the early 1990s to the immense power of the dominant neoliberal discourse at the time, which left little room for alternative approaches: "Anti-communist sentiment left little room for those who remained to articulate alternatives to 'shock therapy' and the 'three zatsias' (*privatizatsia, demokratizatsia, liberalizatsia*), (…)". According to Müller (2001), the initial euphoria about the free market economy resulted in a close entanglement of research and policy, seriously hampering critical research. In his view, representatives of the neoliberal discourse occupied the scene before the political and social sciences could even start to articulate their positions. Either way, this meant that, for many years, the objections raised by new institutional economics (see 2.1.2) remained the only effective and widely perceived critique of the transition paradigm. A review of critical transition literature gives the impression that it was mainly the World Bank's paradigm shift itself[7] that eventually triggered a theoretically informed analysis of post-socialist transformation and a more fundamental critique of transition policy in the post-socialist space[8].

[7] Public resistance to the Washington Consensus first became pronounced in 1999 during the 'battle of Seattle' at the WTO Ministerial Conference, and afterwards in the annual debates hold at the World Social Forum in Brazil (Scoones 2009).

[8] The fact that the sociological transition critique built more on local and regional case study analysis than on economic modeling and forecasts may have been another reason why it lagged behind mainstream transitology.

2.2.1 From a 'theory of transition' towards a 'set of conceptual frameworks'

Critical contributions from the social sciences, i.e. sociology, political science, geography, social anthropology and others, have taken the transition critique much further, and to a more fundamental level than NIE. In principle, this 'sociological critique', as I call it, starts from the 1996 World Development Report's observation that there were obvious 'deviations' from the predicted linear transition path. Unlike the Bank's subsequent, self-critical discourse, however, independent authors do not attribute these 'deviations' to the hitherto insufficient attention paid to the role of institutions and the failure to draft functioning rules and regulations. Instead, they argue that such a large variety of mostly unexpected transition outcomes must be the result of as many different transformation processes, taking place "at the intersection of economy, politics, social structure and culture" and at various levels (Müller 2001, 10). Mainstream transitology, so the argument goes, is unable to adequately explain such variety for two different reasons. First, modernist thinking is normative, since it is oriented towards the outcome (free market, democracy, growth, welfare) of the transition process rather than its course[9]. Now that the intermittent outcomes were anything but the expected, the normative model of a directed process was obviously failing to explain what had happened (Hopfmann 1997a; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Müller 2001). Second, neoliberal thinking (market) and institutional economics (institutions) each emphasize only one single factor to explain transition processes. Given the complexity of the processes observed, however, such single-factor theorizing can no longer be upheld. In summary, the criticism is that the mainstream conception of transition is woefully under-theorized (Smith and Pickles 1998, 2ff; Müller 2001, 10).

Transformation as a non-linear, undirected process of structuration

Building on advances in sociological and development theory, the new critics have thus targeted the normative, functionalist assumption behind the transition paradigm, i.e. the simplistic idea that transition can be 'made' and 'directed', and that institutions can be 'built'. They argue that development in general and post-socialist transition in particular encompasses more than simply designing and implementing proper rules and 'robust' institutions. Instead, it is a complex reciprocity between old and new institutions and the actors whom they are made for, i.e. a recursive relationship between structure and agency. The result of this relationship is a constant re-working of development rooted in the socialist past into something new[10]:

> „Thus, it is important to view the transformation as a combination of path-dependent evolutionary social and economic change with active path-shaping change based upon key active decisions of social institutions and decisive actors." (Pavlinek 2003, 95)

Thus reconnected with Giddens' theory of structuration, processes of transformation definitely become dissociated from linear, deterministic conceptions, without arguing for indeterminancy. Instead, they appear as evolutionary, multi-directional and open-ended processes, in which actors – intentionally or not – recombine the old and the new and improvise on practised routines to adjust and respond to all the challenges transition confronts them with (Stark 1996, 995; Stark and Bruszt 2001, 1132f). Ultimately, *transformation* also encompasses developments that move away from the neoliberal ideals of a free market and democracy – something the modernization terminology would call 'failures of transition' (Herbers 2006b, 9f).

[9] Stark (1992, 18) calls it "cookbook capitalism".
[10] A process that many authors prefer to call *transformation* rather than *transition*; see below.

'Charting diversity'

The sociological critique thus represents a shift of focus, away from finding the right tools to get an already predicted process back on track and towards finding the right vocabulary to describe – and the proper instruments to analyze – a variety of processes commonly referred to collectively as 'transformation'. Outlining a 'political economy of transition', Smith and Pickles (1998, 5) articulate

> "a need (…) for an alternative set of conceptual frameworks on transition to challenge the neo-liberal hegemony and account for the variety of strategies, techniques and effects that constitute transition-in-process (…). We do not want to articulate a single, hegemonic perspective (…) [because] the variety of actually existing transitions does not allow this."

Consequently, critical transition research has refrained from crafting a 'theory of transition' but has increasingly gone for the analysis of qualitative single-case studies and for the development of "middle-range concepts capable of (…) charting diversity" (Stark and Bruszt 2001, 1130). Herbers (2006b, 8) shows the different motivations for that shift. While some believe that it was but a matter of time until there was sufficient empirical and theoretical knowledge available to write a new grand theory of transition, others argue that the complexity and geographical specifics of transformation would on principle make it impossible to do so: "(…) *transformation* of a given societal entity cannot be analyzed without paying attention to what is empirically observable in the supposed *transformation* of that specific entity" (Beyer 2006, 46; emphasis in the original; see also Pavlinek 2003, 88; Müller 2001, 11).

'Transition' versus 'transformation'

The first question to arise from this shift of focus then is what 'transition' or 'transformation' is. Müller (2001, 10) suggests that it would be best to define 'transformation' as the sum of the transition countries' diverse reactions to a common problem constellation. Similarly, Burawoy and Verdery (1999, 16) conceive the 'process of transition' as the continual, nonlinear and uneven interaction between policy and reaction. Finke (2004, 2) uses 'transformation' as a description of systemic change, i.e. the passage between two systems, while he rejects 'transition' as too normative and teleological and therefore inadequate for the purposes of analysis. In a comparable attempt to grasp the complexity and multi-dimensionality of post-socialist change, Altvater (1998, 594f) argues that there was not "a simple transition from 'there' to 'here' (…) but a complex and articulated transformation of social, political and economic *forms*, not to mention changes of individual habits, social culture and the social relation to nature" [original italics]. In a similar manner, Stark (1992, 22) stresses the fundamental difference between transition, which emphasizes destination, and transformation, which emphasizes actual processes.

So while some authors actively dissociate themselves from the neoliberal discourse by using 'transformation' instead of 'transition', others continue with a critically reflected notion of 'transition' (cf. Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 14ff). Herbers (2006b, 5) shows that most authors use 'transformation' as a general but often vaguely defined guiding theme for their analyses. The common denominator of all these elaborations seems the idea to relieve 'transition' and/or 'transformation' from its normative character and to use it instead for circumscribing the common subject of investigation, i.e. processes of change in post-socialist systems. Most critical approaches have adopted an evolutionary, path-dependent understanding of transformation processes and agree that they may yield multiple outcomes (Pavlinek 2003, 88f).

Since one of this study's key concerns is to analyze the effects of transition policy upon local actors, institutions and processes and vice versa, it seems useful to distinguish between 'transition' in the sense of overall (normative) transition policy and 'transformation' in the sense of related processes of livelihoods transformation and institutional change in a given spatial context – in other words, the reworking of

transition policy through local-level processes of transformation, adaptation and reconfiguration (Stark 1992).

A critical examination of transition and transformation also raises the inevitable question of what, then, *postsocialism* is, and whether the notion still means something. If transformation is considered a continuum, where then should the shift from *pre* to *post* be placed? Nevertheless, as Caroline Humphrey argues (in: Hann et al. 2002, 26ff), there are good reasons to retain the term for the time being. After all, socialism remains an important point of reference for many, although younger people increasingly reject the notion as a reference to something outside their own personal experience (see also Pickles 2010).

Towards a 'critical political economy of transition'

The second question raised by the sociological critique is how all these diverse processes of transformation can be adequately conceptualized, i.e. how the abovementioned 'set of conceptual frameworks on transition' or 'middle-range concepts' might look. Smith and Pickles (1998, 6) propose to "rebuild a critical political economy of transition" around arguments about path-dependency, the changing role of the state and society, institutional change, and the role of social networks in reforms. Such a multifaceted and multidisciplinary analytical approach would make it possible to analyze various actors, institutions and processes at different levels of the transformation process, without being bent on drafting a new 'grand theory of transition'.

Over the last ten to fifteen years, an increasing number of researchers from various disciplines have begun to look critically into processes of post-socialist transformation at different levels. Findings from (institutional) economy, political sciences, geography, sociology, ethnography and others have thus contributed to what may be collectively described as a rich, yet very heterogeneous 'critical political economy of transition'. The next section discusses some of its most important cross-cutting themes that seem relevant to decipher processes of transformation in rural Kyrgyzstan.

2.2.2 Key concepts: path-dependency, hybridity, bricolage and uncertainty

The sociological critique has taken up the notions of path-dependency and multiple ways of transition (or *transition trajectories*) from institutional economics and has gradually transferred their application from macro- to micro-level analyses. The two notions are closely related and build on three arguments.

Differing initial conditions, important legacy, path-dependent development

First, intial conditions differ. The tendency of neoliberal reformers to assume more or less similar 'starting conditions' (and, consequently, a comparable destiny) for all transition countries appears inappropriate, given the fact that all these countries (and regions) have had their own economic, social and political history. Although commonly subsumed into the notion of the Eastern Bloc (or Communist Bloc), national and regional disparities at the onset of reforms were large, both in regard to the development during the socialist era as well as in terms of their cultural and institutional legacies from pre-colonial and pre-socialist times (Herbers 2006b, 4). Pavlinek (2003, 89) calls this assumed homogeneity of all former socialist states a "pessimistic functionalism" that would provide a wrong impression of the region.

Second, legacy matters. Understanding development as a path-dependent process involves acknowledging that the economic, political and social conditions that exist at a particular time have a considerable influence upon everything that comes afterwards.

With regard to post-socialist transition, this means acknowledging the potential of the *socialist* legacy to structure *post-socialist* development. Such a perspective suggests that the collapse of the socialist system in 1991 should be perceived as a gradual process (although with a highly increased frequency of processes of re-working networks, power and institutions) rather than a shock that creates an 'institutional vacuum' (reflected in the World Bank's *tabula rasa* conception). Consequently, an appropriate analysis of post-socialist development depends on a proper understanding of the socialist legacy. Katherine Verdery's (1991) early call for such an approach has unfortunately received little attention. In a convincing attempt to theorize the dynamics of 'real socialism', she has called for a theoretical understanding of "the social order that went before (…) [because] in purporting to characterize what eastern European societies are 'transiting' *from*, it illuminates certain areas as critical for research in the coming decade (…) [and] we can expect to learn more about socialism during the transition than we have to date." (419f; original italics)[11].

Third, development is path-dependent. *Path*-dependency must not be confused with *past*-dependency in the sense that the socialist legacy simply persists to influence (or hinder) the development of new structures, such as a free market economy and democracy. Instead, it describes the constant, active re-working of inherited and new structures by decisive actors (compare with the quote from Pavlinek above). The notion of path-dependency thus again takes up the idea of transformation as a process of structuration (compare 2.2.1). People's agency is not only influenced by a particular, existing institutional context (e.g. a particular set of transition policies), but the intended and unintended outcomes of what they do alters this context as well. Giddens (1997, 569f) calls this the "active making and re-making of social structure in the course of everyday activities". From this perspective, transition branches out into a multitude of different *pathways of transition* or *transition trajectories*. Since human agency always yields unintended outcomes, anticipating all these trajectories is impossible. As I will show later on (2.3), the notion of *trajectories* thus also serves as a useful concept to grasp processes of transformation at the micro level.

Simultaneity of development

Simultaneity is another factor shaping *transition trajectories*. It is of particular relevance for post-socialist development processes, and is often brought forward to distinguish them from development processes in general (cf. Stark and Bruszt 2001, 1131; Herbers 2006b, 5ff). Offe (1994, 57ff) has shown how the collapse of the socialist order triggered parallel processes of change in the political, economic and social sphere. This simultaneity made decisions affecting the development of one or the other sphere extremely difficult. Being confronted with several fundamental challenges at the same time – building democracy, privatizing state property, facilitating free markets –, actors have no other choice than to address them all at once, and this often results in mutually obstructive effects. Consequently, policy measures, legal reforms, development interventions and all other kinds of responses to the socialist collapse begin to overlap and interfere with each other, because they hardly ever follow the same pace. These parallel processes are often asynchronous and hardly ever harmonize with each other (Stark 1992, 18f; Hopfmann 1997b, 24). Simultaneity thus affects different actors and institutions at all levels. As a result, post-socialist transformation and the resulting *transition trajectories* are characterized by a twofold simultaneity: on the one hand, there is the simultaneous existence of the old and the new, the persistent and the transferred, and this is all contained in the term path-dependency. On the other hand, there is a need for actors at various levels to address the particular challenges of postsocialism all at once.

[11] Other authors took up Verdery's argument a few years later (cf. Altvater 1998, 593f; Carothers 2002, 16).

Hybridity, gray zone, bricolage

As a result of this twofold simultaneity, the (intermediate) outcomes of transformation processes are not only numerous and very different from each other ('multiple outcomes'), but often also of a hybrid character. In other words, processes of transformation do not lead to completely free market economies or purely democratic systems (whatever those might be), but nor does the old socialist system persist unchanged and unchallenged. On the one hand, this applies to the policy level: Lindner and Moser (2009) for instance describe the privatization process in post-socialist rural Russia as a 'hybrid privatization' that constantly hovers between different degrees of economic freedom and state intervention. On the other hand, hybridity also exists at the micro-level: depending on the situation, individuals and groups may stick or revert to routine behavior patterns or handed-down social networks to reach their objectives, or they may repeatedly refer to different sets of institutions (Hopfmann 1997b, 24f; Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 8). The sociological transition critique has put forward different notions to capture this diversity, such as *bricolage* (Cleaver 2001), *recombinant property* (Stark 1992, 1996; Stark and Bruszt 2001), *gray zone* (Carothers 2002, in regard to transitional political regimes), or *hybridity* (Hopfmann 1997a; 1997b; Koehler and Zürcher 2004)[12]. In the end, all these notions come rather close to what legal pluralists circumscribe under the term *forum shopping* (compare 2.3.3).

Uncertainty

Last but not least, the transition critique has repeatedly related processes of post-socialist transformation to the rise of uncertainty and has identified two main causes. First, the collapse of key institutions of the socialist system – state-sponsored healthcare, education, social security and guaranteed employment – has led to the loss of former safeguards and routines and thus to a severe destabilization of post-socialist societies. In many cases, rapid decentralization policies have also fostered legal and political uncertainty, especially at the local level, where human and financial resources to adopt the new rights and responsibilities are often absent (Hopfmann 1997b; Finke 2004; Herbers 2006b). Second, the rapid privatization of former state property in the early 1990s has fundamentally redefined property rights over natural (e.g. land, water), financial (e.g. revenues) and physical resources (e.g. infrastructure). Because "property relations exist not between persons and things but between persons in respect of things" (Hann 2006, 19), this has fundamentally altered the social relations between people. In the absence of sufficient political and legal security, this alteration has often given rise to new conflicts over resources between competing individuals and user groups (Mehta et al. 1999, 2001; Kandiyoti 2002; Sikor 2002; Bichsel et al. 2010). With reference to Giddens, Herbers (2006b) can thus describe transformation as a 'critical situation', which is characterized by the dissolution of people's routine behavior and livelihood strategies and thus by a general uncertainty about how others behave and what they do. All in all, post-socialist transformation has made the interactions between institutions, policies and actors at different levels less predictable, increasing transaction costs and uncertainty for all those involved (compare 2.4.2).

* * *

In essence, the sociological transition critique shows that an analysis of the multiple *processes of transformation*, including their socialist legacy as well as former and current practices and institutions, has a far greater potential to reveal what post-socialist transformation may be and where its manifold trajectories may lead to, than an analysis based on a linear, normative *concept of transition*. However, such a critical analysis requires a proper analytical framework that makes it possible to grasp actors, practices and institutions (including property relations) in transformation.

[12] For an excellent metaphor describing post-socialist path-dependency and hybridity, see Stark and Bruszt (2001, 1129).

2.3 Organizations, institutions, and practices in transformation

"I am in no way arguing that formal organization is irrelevant to what is happening – only that formal organization is not what is happening."

(Barth 1993, 157)

In line with the sociological transition critique, I argue that the key to gaining a better understanding of post-socialist transformation lies in the analysis of the recursive relationship between agency and structure, i.e. between people's behavior and practices on the one hand, and a constantly changing organizational and institutional context on the other hand. I therefore predicate my analysis on the assumption that institutional change is not simply initiated by politicians and their advisors, who draft new transition policies, issue new laws and adjust certain regulations. Instead, institutions and institutional change are equally produced and reproduced at the local, the household and the individual level. Individuals and groups of actors constantly refashion existing rules and structures, give them new meaning and incorporate them into their daily lives in many different ways.

The advances of New Institutional Economics (NIE) and Common Property Resources theory (CPR) have informed the first effective critique of the neoliberal transition paradigm (compare 2.1.2). Therefore, their basic conceptions are key for a better understanding of institutions and organizations (2.3.1). Subsequently, the sociological critique of these conceptions has put forward a broader, less functionalist view of institutions (2.3.2). I have built my conceptual framework for the analysis of institutions and institutional change on this 'embedded' understanding of institutions. To do so, I refer to the advances in property rights and legal pluralism theory (2.3.3) as well as to a broader concept of institutions and organizations as brought forward by Appendini and Nuijten (2002; 2.3.4).

2.3.1 Institutions in the New Institutional Economics and in Common Property Resources theory

New Institutional Economics (NIE) and Common Property Resources (CPR) theory have made a significant contribution to a better understanding of the importance and the role of institutions in economies, and have elaborated the first widespread critique of the transition paradigm (compare 2.1.2). By showing that local people can successfully manage natural resources through a set of rules and regulations (institutions), CPR theory additionally presented a strong case against Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' (cf. Hardin 1968; North 1991, 2002; Ruttan 1998; Ostrom 1999a, 1999b, 2005; Mehta et al. 2001; Haller 2002; Anderies et al. 2003).

Unlike neoclassical and neo-Marxist economic theory, new institutional economists argue that economic growth is strongly determined by the existence of institutions rather than the availability of production factors alone (labor, money, resources). Thus, economic growth is also path-dependent in regard to institutional development rather than in regard to technological progress alone (Thomi 2001, 5). The first basic assumption of NIE is that market coordination is not free of cost, but yields certain *transaction costs* – costs that arise when two or more actors engage in an economic transaction. These costs (or, to put it in non-monetary terms, uncertainties) can be reduced through institutions that regulate the behavior of market actors, thus helping individuals to form expectations about the behavior of others. In what has become a

classic definition, North (2002, 3) therefore describes institutions as "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, (…) the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction." NIE thus follows a regulative, normative understanding of institutions (Nuijten 1999, no pagination; Haller 2002, 10; Strasser Schoch 2007, 36).

NIE generally distinguishes between *formal* and *informal* institutions. Formal institutions include rules, laws and constitutions. They are usually developed by the state, local communities or other formal entities. Informal institutions include cultural norms, conventions, traditions, and codes of conduct. They form the basis in which formal institutions are embedded (Haller 2002, 10). A further distinction is made between *institutions* and *organizations*. Both of them structure human interaction, but institutions are made up of (invisible) rules and norms, while organizations are visible and measurable structures, consisting of specific individuals which are bound by a common purpose and represent certain institutions (Mummert 2001; Thomi 2001; North 2002; Koku and Gustafsson 2003). Uphoff (1993) emphasizes this distinction between norms and structure, but also shows that the two can overlap (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Institutions and organizations as overlapping sets (Uphoff 1993, 626)

Institutions that are not organizations	Institutions that are organizations, and vice versa	Organizations that are not institutions
Money	The Central Bank	A local bank
The law	The Supreme Court	A new law partnership
Marriage	'The family'	A particular family
Land tenure	The land registrar's office	A surveying company
Higher education	Oxford University	A tutoring service
Technical assistance	The World Bank	A consulting firm

The second basic assumption of NIE is that individuals are rational and self-interested actors who always seek the best possible outcome. They are constrained, however, by a limited access to knowledge and information. Institutional change is then understood as an aggregation of decisions taken by bounded rational actors. Consequently, NIE, in its analysis of institutions and institutional change, focuses on the individual level (Mummert 2001, 302; Haller 2002, 10).

Common Property Resources (CPR) theory has built on these assumptions to present a collective action approach. It says that several users can take best advantage of a resource if they agree on common rules (institutions) for the use of that resource. Collective action is thus seen as a rational choice beneficial for all group members. Authors including Wade (1998, cit. in Agrawal 2001) and Ostrom (Ostrom 1999a, 2005; Anderies et al. 2003) have arrived at sets of 'facilitating conditions' or 'design principles' for building robust CPR institutions. In both cases, homogenous group interests are considered a crucial criterion (Ruttan 1998; Agrawal 2001; Mehta et al. 2001; Haller 2002).

2.3.2 Towards a more contextualized understanding of institutions

In recent years, NIE and CPR theory have been increasingly challenged and developed by authors who have looked into the dynamics of property regimes over natural resources (cf. Leach et al. 1999; Agrawal 2001; Mehta et al. 1999, 2001; Cleaver 2000, 2001; Nuijten 1999, 2005; Appendini and Nuijten 2002; Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan 2002; Upton 2005).

Institutions are embedded in the everyday context

A main point of criticism aims at the primacy ascribed to economic rationality at the expense of a broader, less functionalist view of institutions. As Rauch (2001, 13f) critically remarks, NIE comprehends institutional change as widely independent from social change, expecting that a set of institutions designed along certain principles can successfully be implemented anywhere and irrespective of the concrete social and political context. According to Cleaver (2000, 364f), such design principles imply a disputable evolutionist notion in the sense that existing, informal structures should be crafted into more robust (read 'better') institutions, reducing the former to a mere basis on which the latter are to be built. In a similar way, Mehta et al. (1999, 5) criticize NIE for being too static and insensitive towards "(…) the everyday context within which institutions are located and how rooted they are in local history and society". According to Upton (2005, 584), institutions are instead "an integral, unconscious part of daily life" – not at all clear-cut sets of rules for which 'design principles' can be formulated.

The main problem with taking an ahistorical and apolitical view of institutions is that it tends to downplay issues of difference and power among various actors and – as in the case of CPR theory – often relates institutions to collective goals. The assumption that institutions are formed and agreed upon by homogenous communities does not really explain why people often prefer loose and flexible (some say informal) networks and practices to formalized structures and procedures (such as newly established resource user associations). Instead, empirical evidence suggests that individuals or groups are "embedded in multiple institutional settings at the same time" (Nuijten 1999, 1), combining more and less formalized institutions depending on the situation and according to their personal needs. In short, people tend to organize things at local level by mobilizing multiple networks, rather than by joining formal organizations (Nuijten 1999; Mehta et al. 2001; Appendini and Nuijten 2002).

The 'messy middle'

Consequently, many authors reject explicit distinctions between formal and informal institutions, between state, collective and private property, or between the local and the extra-local level. Instead, they emphasize the existence of a *messy middle*, where different institutions and organizations, practices and procedures overlap. This *messy middle* becomes especially important when the rights of marginalized groups are not formally endorsed, giving them a certain room for maneuver to secure their stakes by making use of other, less formal institutions and regulations. This is where the debate adds to the sociological transition critique and the notions of *institutional bricolage* (Cleaver 2001) and *recombinant property* (Stark 1996; compare 2.2.2). However, at the same time as *bricolage* may increase certainty for some, it can cause uncertainty for others, since a blurring of the rules makes it even more difficult to predict the behavior of others (Mehta et al. 1999, 36).

Alternative approaches thus seek to look at institutions in a more contextualized, socially embedded way. Instead of understanding them as sets of formal or informal rules and norms, they conceive of institutions as "regularised patterns of behavior between individuals and groups in society" (Mearns 1995, cit. in Leach et al. 1999, 226). Similarly, Cleaver (2000, 365f) articulates a "need to see institutions in terms of their constituent located practices (…) [since] institutions are partial, intermittent and indeed often invisible, being located in the daily interactions of ordinary lives". Just like NIE, embedded approaches to institutions and institutional change thus start at the individual level, but reject the idea of rational behavior. Instead, they focus on the often-changing and highly complex social relations between, and practices of, individuals and groups, propagating a dynamic understanding of institutions that makes it possible to capture the often invisible and flexible rules and norms regulating the use of resources in societies (Upton 2005, 585).

2.3.3 Property relations as an entry point to analyze the links between institutions and social practice

Recent advances in property rights and legal pluralism theory present a useful entry point to conceptualize the propagated relationship between institutions and social practice. Property is a central institution in all societies and in the most general sense concerns "the ways in which the relations between society's members with respect to valuables are given meaning, form and significance" (Hann 2006, 22). Thus, property relations exist not only between people and objects but between people in respect to these objects:

> "Hence, property regimes are characterised by often ambiguous rules, by flexible membership of organisations, and by overlapping and contested boundaries, and they are sustained in such forms by ongoing social processes." (Mehta et al. 2001, 36).

In that sense, *property* does not just describe one specific type of right or relation such as private or collective ownership, but encompasses a wide variety of different arrangements at different levels, including more formal aspects such as written rules, less formal ones such as people's beliefs and values, as well as concrete practices (Mehta et al. 2001, 35). On the one hand, property rights must therefore be seen as an 'umbrella concept' "which includes several types of rights to different forms and uses of resources" (Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan 2001, 11). They are commonly grouped into the two categories of rights to *use* and rights to *regulate* and *control* (decision-making rights). While an individual actor may have only rights to use a particular resource, he or she may gain decision-making rights over the same resource by joining a larger group of actors. Therefore, *property rights* are better conceptualized as overlapping 'bundles' of rights, rather than in a narrow sense as mere *ownership* (cf. Meinzen-Dick et al. 2004).

On the other hand, property stems from many different sources, such as international and state law, religious law and practices, customary rules and their living interpretation, or certain project regulations. Usually, every source defines property over a certain resource in a different way, so that these multiple normative and cognitive orders influence each other and cannot be analytically separated. Property claims over resources can therefore have multiple and overlapping bases. Depending on the situation and their social, political and economic assets, actors can refer to various legal orders to legitimize their claims, decisions or behavior towards a larger community – a process known as *forum shopping*. In this process, formal state law is but one resource of several to draw upon, and may not even be useful to all actors at all times. This also explains why different people often have totally different views on what the formal structure is (Nuijten 2005, 5). Property rights are therefore best seen as negotiated outcomes between actors who refer to multiple normative and cognitive orders – outcomes, namely, which are often anything but the expected result of 'institutional design'. Instead, power relations between different actors play a decisive role, since the powerful can often draw on more different sources to legitimize their claim and thus establish stronger rights (Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan 2001, 2002; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2004).

Four layers of property

Property must therefore be seen as something highly flexible and volatile. In order to grasp this legal plurality behind property relations and their socially embedded nature analytically, Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006, 14ff) have taken up the idea of a 'bundle' of rights to bring forward a model of property, which distinguishes four different 'layers of social organization' (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 The four layers of social organization according to Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006, 14ff)

Cultural-ideological layer	Ideas and ideology behind property (e.g. neoliberal emphasis on private property)
Layer of legal regulation	Concrete normative and institutional regulations such as laws and regulations
Concrete social relationships	Social relationships between actors, power relations
Property practices	Social practices around the allocation and use of resources

The model emphasizes that property is not just about questions of economic efficiency and legal regulations, but is always embedded in a specific social and political context with links to all four layers. Thus, property is multi-functional and always plural in nature. The first layer includes ideologies and culture, where the neoliberal emphasis on private property may collide with local concepts of common property. The second layer focuses on legal concepts, which are often directly related to ideologies and concepts, but are more specific in the sense that they define concrete rules and procedures. Here again, state-defined laws and customary rules may either coincide or collide. The third layer emphasizes the gap between *de jure* and *de facto*, i.e. that people's actual property relations are often different from abstract norms defined by state, customary or religious law. Such relations are often multifunctional and reflect local power relations shaped by community and kin or by social, political or economic dependencies (e.g. patron-client relations). The fourth layer – property practices – feeds back into each of the preceding three layers. It is in concrete practices where laws, ideologies and social relationships become reflected, reproduced, and eventually transformed. According to Hann (2000, 8), this is also the layer at which conflicts between actors can be identified. Thus, the model by Benda-Beckmann et al. again emphasizes the central role of social practices in any analysis of institutional arrangements and change.

Property regimes and post-socialist transition policy

Property relations and legal pluralism thus offer a useful entry point to deal analytically with transition policy in the post-socialist space (cf. Verdery 1999; Hann 2000, 2003, 2006; Alexander 2004). In Kyrgyzstan, just as in many other former socialist countries, the imposition of the neoliberal property paradigm in the 1990s has led to a fundamental legal redefinition of property rights. Ideologies have changed (from socialism to neo-liberalism), and laws and regulations become continuously adjusted (concrete transition politics; compare chapter 4). At the same time, the parallel decentralization of the state administration has weakened the role of the central state in favor of the regional and the local level. At a first glance, this has strengthened local and regional actors because they have been endowed with new resources and with more power to decide and control.

However, a more nuanced view of property as introduced above suggests that this endowment with resources has been more than just a reallocation of material objects. Since "property relations exist not between persons and things but between persons in respect of things" (Hann 2006, 19), the reforms of the 1990s have also fundamentally altered the social relations between actors. A new ideology regarding property, a bunch of new formal laws on resource use and the distortion of local hierarchies have fundamentally altered the multiple normative and cognitive orders behind property, as well as ways of drawing on them. Consequently, individuals and groups have adjusted the ways they behave and act, and altered their social practices in relation to resources and other people. At the same time, however – as I will show in this thesis – many former regulations and concrete social relations from the socialist economy have persisted and continue to influence local property relations and institutional change up to the present. Thus, property in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan is not only shaped by legal definitions of private, state or common property, but also by factors such as new and

inherited local power structures, various forms of income generation, mutual economic dependencies, uncertainty, land scarcity and others.

The four layers of Benda-Beckmann et al. thus help to understand the embedded nature of property better and to examine empirically the recursive relationship between institutions and practice. However, focusing on property alone would unnecessarily limit the scope of my analysis. Even if conceptualized in a very broad sense, including "aspects of citizenship (…), such as the right to (…) subsistence, to the long-term continuation of one's primary collective identity" (Hann 2000, 18), the concept risks precluding other forms of institutions and organization that may equally influence what people do.

2.3.4 Towards a conceptual framework for the analysis of organizations, institutions, and processes of institutionalization

In order to get a better grasp of the various forms of institution, organization and processes of institutional change, I therefore use an analytical concept that was developed by Monique Nuijten and Kirsten Appendini (Table 2.4; Nuijten 1999; Appendini and Nuijten 2002).

Organizations, institutions and the local institutional context

The concept upholds the distinction between institutions and organizations advanced by New Institutional Economics and Common Property Resource theory. With reference to Scott (1995), organizations are defined as "entities set up around defined processes that result in the attainment of particular goals" (Appendini and Nuijten 2002, 73). Organizations are based and depend upon a certain institutional setting. However, the authors reject the artificial divide between formal and informal, local and extra-local, or state, collective and private institutions. Therefore, and in line with legal pluralism, they define institutions as highly flexible, negotiated orders that consist of "cognitive, normative and regulative structures and activities that provide stability, coherence and meaning to social behavior. Institutions are transported by various carriers – cultures, structures, and routine" (ibid., 73). The *local institutional context* is then defined as the specific manifestation of all institutions and organizations relevant within a given geographical area (e.g. a region or a village), whether or not they are 'physically present' at the local level.

Organizing practices and processes of institutionalization

Just like Benda-Beckmanns' *property practices*, Appendini and Nuijten pay particular attention to the social practices shaping institutions and institutional change. For this, they adopt the notion of *organizing practices*. It builds on the assumption that certain forms of structuring or patterning can be found in the manner in which people try to achieve certain objectives. These forms hardly ever result from a common understanding or a normative agreement on certain rules, but are fragmentary and closely related to forms of social inclusion and exclusion, and thus also to power relations. Organizing practices can therefore be found in personal networks, group formations, individual relationships or ad-hoc constellations – relationships in which formal organizations and institutions often play only an indirect and partial role. Yet although situation-specific, organizing practices may follow certain regular patterns and may develop into regularized (but not necessarily formalized) practices or institutions over time. It is through such *processes of institutionalization* that organizing practices can give rise to the emergence of institutions, and thus to *institutional change* (ibid., 73). The concept thus offers a useful analytical tool to examine the micro-level processes behind processes of institutional change and post-socialist transformation.

Table 2.4 Core concepts (based on: Nuijten 1999; Appendini and Nuijten 2002, 73)

	Definition	***Examples***
Organizing practices	Different actions and strategies that people follow to sustain and develop their daily livelihoods and other life projects	*Personal networks, group formations, individual relations and alliances, ad-hoc constellations*
Institutions	Cognitive, regulative and normative structures and activities that provide stability, coherence and meaning to social behavior	*Household, family, clan, gender relations, community, property rights (e.g. land ownership, water use rights), rules, laws, constitutions*
Organizations	Entities set up around defined processes that result in the attainment of particular goals	*Credit groups, farming cooperatives, regional bank branches, local government, NGOs, user and producer associations, self-help groups, private companies*
Local institutional context	Constituted by the specific manifestations of institutions and organizations in a given geographical area, even though these institutions might extend beyond the physical boundaries of that area	*Concrete entity of institutions and organizations within the boundaries of a village, community or town*

Two reasons led me to adopt an anthropological approach towards institutions for my analysis of processes of post-socialist transformation and institutional change in rural Kyrgyzstan. First, it starts from the idea of *agency* or *social practice* instead of *structure* and thus offers a better way of understanding the driving forces behind recent developments at the micro level. Second, the anthropological approach accepts the *messy middle* between the formal and the informal and is thus open to notions such as *hybridity*, *institutional bricolage*, *recombinant property*, or *forum shopping*. The approach thus makes it possible to examine how actors in the post-socialist context improvise on practised routines to rebuild organizations and institutions with – and not 'on' – the remnants of the socialist past, and how in an uncertain environment, actors try to keep hold of their resources by maneuvering across various legitimating principles and standards of measure (Stark 1996, 993ff).

Such an explicit focus on the analysis of actors and their social practices inevitably raises the question of who these actors actually are and how their diverse practices in a highly dynamic context can be analyzed and described. I therefore develop an analytical approach to the study of actors in transformation in the next section.

2.4 Actors in transformation

"(...) we chose to follow the actors, observing what they did in the face of extraordinary uncertainties and documenting the patterns of conflict and alliance that reshaped institutions."

(Stark and Bruszt 2001, 1132)

So far, I have argued that research of institutional change and processes of post-socialist transformation requires a shift of focus towards local actors and micro-level processes. If institutions are understood as the negotiated outcome between actors who refer to multiple normative and cognitive orders, then empirical research needs to focus on the concrete engagement of various actors in local-level processes. The capabilities and resources of individuals and groups, their inherited and newly adopted attitudes, experiences, habits and behavioral patterns all result in sometimes creative, sometimes resistive local contributions to the various 'paths' of post-socialist transformation. Smith and Pickles (1998, 11) point out that the diversity of responses to transition policies builds on differing local capacities, conditions and histories. In addition, many authors argue that the high degree of hybridity, uncertainty and disorientation that characterize post-socialist transformation processes calls for a detailed analysis of local actors' ways of coping with that uncertainty and their flexible day-to-day responses (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Stark and Bruszt 2001; Hann 2002; Humphrey and Verdery 2004; Hörschelmann 2002; Pavlinek 2003; Herbers 2006b).

Adopting these arguments, I deploy a conceptual framework in this thesis that takes account of the diversity of local actors' responses to transition, their ways of coping with uncertainty, and their active role in shaping development processes. As a first step, I therefore refer to recent advances in the study of rural livelihoods that help to grasp actors, their capabilities and objectives better (2.4.1). In a second section, I examine how the different forms of uncertainty so characteristic of post-socialist transformation affect people's livelihoods (2.4.2). This finally leads me to the concept of *livelihood trajectories*, which enables one to analyze livelihood dynamics over time (2.4.3).

2.4.1 Local actors and response in a livelihoods perspective

Any attempt to understand actors and their practices at local level involves adopting a people-centred research perspective. In development research, this perspective has mainly been developed by the livelihoods approach. It entered the development discourse in the late 1980s as a response to conventional analytical approaches to development and to the dominance of an economic and technical focus in development cooperation.

Today's diverse livelihoods literature[13] builds to a large extent on the groundbreaking work of Chambers and Conway (1992), who linked discussions about sustainable development triggered by the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report to Amartya Sen's notion of capability with an explicit focus on people. Instead of natural and physical (technical) resources, the livelihoods approach puts people at the centre of development. It attempts to comprehend the complexity and diversity of how people

[13] Over the last few years, NCCR N-S has done extensive livelihoods research in various thematic and geographical contexts, among others: Liechti 2002; Steimann 2005; Kaspar 2005; Rohner 2006; Thieme 2006; Lindberg 2007; Nair et al. 2007; Shigavea 2007; Schoch 2008; Näscher 2009; Shahbaz 2008, 2009; Strasser Schoch 2009. For a critical review, see also Geiser et al. (forthcoming).

make a living by analyzing their access to and their strategies of using and combining various resources.

> "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living." (Chambers and Conway 1992, 7)

The perspective thus acknowledges that livelihoods are multidimensional and complex, composed of economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological aspects, and closely linked to institutional and organizational regulations (de Haan and Zoomers 2003, 350). Three aspects make the perspective particularly innovative for development research.

Capabilities, assets and response

First, livelihoods thinking is people-centered: it builds on the notion of 'capability' as defined by Sen (Sen 1985; Dreze and Sen 1989; in: Bagchi et al. 1998), which is concerned with the (in)ability of individuals to act and to pursue certain goals. People are not seen as victims, but instead as capable and dynamic actors who can draw on a set of resources to define their own objectives and respond to changing circumstances, such as shocks or trends (see below). In line with the *livelihoods guidance sheets* (DFID 2001), many livelihood studies commonly categorize these resources (also referred to as *assets* or *capital*) into five different types, i.e. human capital (skills, knowledge, labor, health and education) social capital (networks and connectedness, membership of groups, and relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchange) natural capital (private and common property resources such as land, water or forest), physical capital (private and common basic infrastructure and producer goods, such as transport, shelter, energy, and information), and financial capital (available stocks such as cash savings or livestock, (ir)regular inflow of money such as earned income, pensions, remittances, loans and credits).

While this categorization of assets has triggered extensive debates and has been repeatedly modified or extended by adding other asset types (cf. Korf 2004a; Scoones 2009; Geiser et al. forthcoming), the real advance of focusing on assets seems to be that people's assets are taken into consideration at all. Even if at first glance what poor people have may appear marginal, the livelihoods perspective starts with the assumption that individuals or groups of actors (e.g. households) are able to combine different assets with each other, pool them with those of other actors, convert certain assets into other ones, and finally use them for particular activities to secure their livelihoods. Such *coping responses* or *strategies*[14] can be aimed at changing or preserving given circumstances, and may take the form of immediate, short-term action or continuous, long-term activity. Thus, livelihood research stands for 'optimistic' studies dealing with people's capability to actively shape development, initiate change and achieve certain objectives and outcomes (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, 29).

Externalities and the institutional context

Nevertheless, the livelihoods perspective acknowledges that people cannot access and use their assets and develop and pursue their strategies independently. Instead, they do so in a wider context of externalities. On the one hand, actors must deal with externalities that lie far beyond their control in the short and medium term. These include shocks (short-term, often unanticipated events with an immediate effect such as natural disasters, economic collapse, livestock or human diseases or political conflicts), trends (long-term developments such as population growth, resource decline, changes in governance or technological innovations) or seasonalities (mid-term changes, such as

[14] Mainstream livelihoods literature (cf. DFID 2001) usually emphasizes the notion of *livelihood strategy*, which implies strategic, target-oriented conduct. I argue, however, that much human conduct is non-strategic in the sense that actors are not able to actively specify the objectives of what they do. In order to capture such non-strategic conduct, I therefore prefer to distinguish between livelihood *strategies* and coping *responses*.

price or output fluctuations). This range of natural, social and political externalities constitutes particular challenges and uncertainties to which people must adapt and respond. Depending on the availability of and access to different resources and their ability to make use of them in a meaningful way, actors are more or less able to cope with such externalities (DFID 2001; Ashley et al. 2003; Korf 2004; Chambers 2006; Shahbaz 2008; Geiser et al. forthcoming).

On the other hand, actors deploy their coping responses within a wider institutional context (compare 2.3.4) which affects not only people's capacity to access, combine and use certain resources, but also their ways of interacting with other actors, as well as the terms of exchange between different types of resources. Unlike the abovementioned externalities, which lie outside the control of actors, and with reference to the socially embedded nature of institutional arrangements, individual and group actors can however actively contribute to the shaping of institutions. What people do to pursue their livelihoods, i.e. their various responses to cope with external changes in the short and the long run, can thus be seen as 'organizing practices' in Appendini and Nuijten's sense of the term (2002, 73): "Different actions and strategies that people follow to sustain and develop their daily livelihoods and other life projects."

Beyond economic primacy

Last but not least, livelihood thinking argues that resources not only have an economic value, but also an inherent, subjective meaning that evolves from social interaction between actors. Consequently, social practices and categories like identity and status gain central importance for livelihoods and are as crucial as the economic value of resources. Or, as Bebbington (1999, 2022) puts it: "People's assets are not merely *means* through which they make a living; they also give *meaning* to the person's world." (original italics). Inheritance of land, for instance, is thus not only seen as a transfer of an economic resource between two generations, but also as a social practice within a household or family. This also means that the resources people draw upon are by no means related to agrarian production alone – an insight which considerably contributed to the disentanglement of the conventional merge of the concepts 'rural' and 'agricultural' (Bebbington 1999).

Eventually, the increased attention to individuals and their values and practices has also fostered the application of qualitative methods and ethnographic approaches in development research. Consequently, livelihoods research often starts at the household level, conceptualizing household as a social and economic entity in which individuals pool and share their resources and skills[15] (Chambers and Conway 1992; Bagchi et al. 1998; Ellis 1998; Bebbington 1999; DFID 2001; de Haan and Zoomers 2003; 2005; Korf 2004; Thieme 2006; 2008a; Nair et al. 2007).

2.4.2 Livelihoods and uncertainty

Recent anthropological and sociological research has begun to relate processes of rapid change to the rise of uncertainty. In the case of post-socialist transformation, the sociological transition critique has ascribed uncertainty mainly to the collapse of the former economic and political order, as well as to the fundamental redefinition of property rights after 1991 (compare 2.2.2). Consequently, uncertainty has also increasingly been seen as a driving force of transformation processes, both aggravating but also fostering certain processes of change. Or, as Scoones (1995, 6) puts it:

> "There are two basic alternatives for planning in an uncertain world. The first aims to reduce uncertainties (…) by the collection of more and more data on more and more variables. (…) The alternative is to accept that uncertainty and indeterminacy are fundamental and central."

[15] For a critical discussion of the households as an analytical entity, see 3.2.

The livelihoods perspective accounts for uncertainty in the sense that it considers people's conduct as a response to certain externalities which are beyond the actors' influence. From that perspective, the Soviet collapse can be seen as a shock, and the subsequent neoliberal reform policy as a trend, which both have deeply affected people's livelihoods.

Four types of uncertainties

Various authors concerned with livelihoods research have further developed the linkages between human conduct and uncertainty, and have contrasted the latter with the notion of risk (cf. Mehta et al. 1999, 2001; Little et al. 2001). They argue that actors can deal with *risk* by calculating alternative outcomes or probabilities and can avoid or at least minimize it if economic and social costs allow. By contrast, *uncertainty* describes a situation characterized by indeterminacies, making it impossible to calculate probabilities. However, since uncertainty can affect all spheres of human conduct, the concept requires further analytical distinction. Mehta et al. (1999, 2001) differentiate between ecological, livelihood, knowledge, and social and political uncertainties (Table 2.5)

Table 2.5 Four types of uncertainties (based on Mehta et al. 2001)

Ecological uncertainties	Environments are not necessarily stable and balanced.
Livelihood uncertainties	Economic systems are in a constant state of flux.
Knowledge uncertainties	Knowledge is always partial, situated and contested.
Social & political uncertainties	Sociopolitical configurations often change.

Ecological uncertainties relate to the unpredictable and variable nature of ecosystems with which people interact. Since the effects among variables within an ecosystem are often complex and intermittent, non-equilibrial dynamics are often the norm. This is particularly true for dryland ecosystems, where resource management is often highly complex, since it is not a matter of adhering to a single factor, but of seizing opportunities and flexible response. For instance, pastoral production systems are often interpreted as a direct coping response to environmental uncertainty, because their intrinsic mobility allows people to respond flexibly to droughts and general resource scarcity in dryland ecosystems (cf. Scoones 1995; Scholz 1997; Hesse and MacGregor 2006).

Livelihood uncertainties mainly refer to the generally unstable and unpredictable conditions in the economic sphere. Capital flows or exchange rate fluctuations often influence what people produce, and access to labor and commodity markets is often anything but secure. In the absence of reliable rules and regularities, the behavior of other actors is difficult to predict, as are the outcomes of what they do. In addition, new economic opportunities may fundamentally alter people's livelihoods, for instance when men migrate to cities and leave their families to take over all farming activities (Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan 2001).

Knowledge uncertainties exist because lay and scientific knowledge are both always plural, contingent, situated and contested. Each individual actor relies on different sets of information that are, furthermore, located within particular institutional settings (Mehta et al. 2001). Thus, people's knowledge about markets, the behavior of others or institutional arrangements is always incomplete and necessarily gives rise to uncertainties.

Social and political uncertainties relate to social developments such as rural exodus or urban immigration, as well as to changes in political regime, including altered power

relations at regional and communal level. For instance, decentralization policies may, at least temporarily, add to political uncertainties at various levels, since it redistributes responsibilities and powers between various actors. In a similar manner, multiple, simultaneous interventions by the state, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations and other groups may cause confusion and generate unanticipated outcomes (Mehta et al. 2001).

It is important to note that these different types of uncertainty often overlap and influence each other. For instance, the redistribution of state powers may add to political uncertainties, which may further increase knowledge uncertainties among various actors. Thus, the four categories cannot always be clearly distinguished from one another. At the same time, as Mehta et al. (2001, 2) note, "uncertainty is experienced very differently in different places and amongst people distinguished by wealth, background, gender, social or political affiliation, and so on." Thus, whether someone considers a situation insecure or not depends to a considerable degree on his or her wealth or social status.

Responding to uncertainty through flexibility: legal pluralism and livelihoods diversification

People often respond to uncertainty by widening their range of options, i.e. by increasing the flexibility of their ways to achieve certain objectives. In general, two phenomena seem to be particularly related to uncertainty. As Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan (2001, 12) show, legal pluralism is a widely adopted means of coping with uncertainties. In times of drought, for example, people who experience problems accessing water resources may try to appeal to norms regarding sharing, while in normal times they prefer rules that exclude others. In a similar way, actors may acknowledge basic livelihood needs as a justification for claiming certain property rights, even though formal laws prohibit it. The flexibility of legal pluralism and the practices related to it – *forum shopping, institutional bricolage, recombinant property* – thus provides an oft-deployed coping response to survive in an uncertain environment. At the same time, however, legal pluralism can also exacerbate knowledge uncertainties. If others refer to multiple normative and cognitive orders to legitimize their claims, it becomes difficult to predict their behavior (compare 2.3.3).

The other form of increasing flexibility is livelihood diversification. Recent actor-oriented research suggests that under constantly uncertain circumstances, people often seek to improve or at least secure their capital base by diversifying their livelihood sources. At household level, diversification thus describes the process of adding new economic activities. However, diversification does not necessarily improve a household's economic situation. On the one hand, long-term diversification is more often than not a strategic choice that allows households to build on complementarities and to spread risk. A typical example of such strategic diversification may be when capital savings, good returns from agriculture or access to affordable credit allow a farming household to open a shop. For the relatively rich, diversification is thus often a strategy of accumulation. On the other hand, short-term diversification is often forced and unplanned when households in financial distress are pushed into diversification. While such diversification may help them to secure a living in the short run, it often exacerbates future impoverishment, because the newly adopted activities compete with existing ones. A household that is unable to cultivate its own land may lease out the land and look for another source of income; or a farmer who cannot get a loan to buy fertilizers may have to accept additional wage labor in order to generate the cash needed (Scoones 1998; Smith and Pickles 1998; Barrett et al. 2001; Little et al. 2001; Ashley et al. 2003; Strasser Schoch 2009).
However, whether and how people diversify does not only depend on socioeconomic differences, but also on the local institutional and ecological context and the related opportunities and constraints. Over the last decade, livelihood studies have repeatedly established a global tendency among rural households to increasingly diversify their livelihoods beyond the agricultural sector and the local level, thus developing a very diverse, often multi-local portfolio. This phenomenon is often interpreted as a response

to the global rise of livelihood opportunities in the form of increased mobility and improved access to national and international labor markets (cf. Bebbington 1999; De Haan and Zoomers 2003).

2.4.3 From livelihoods diversification towards livelihood trajectories

"Understanding change should be at the centre of any analysis of livelihoods." This focus on change and long-term dynamics as emphasized by Ashley et al. (2003, 2.2) seems particularly relevant to the analysis of livelihoods in a transformation context. While the notions of *strategy* and *response* help to distinguish the different ways in which people try to sustain their livelihoods, they are of little use when describing processes of livelihood change over long periods of time. This is so because most actors deploy strategic and non-strategic conduct simultaneously, so that livelihood strategies and coping responses overlap, and intended and unintended outcomes coincide. Consequently, analyzing a single strategy or response reveals only little about the prospects of a household's livelihoods.

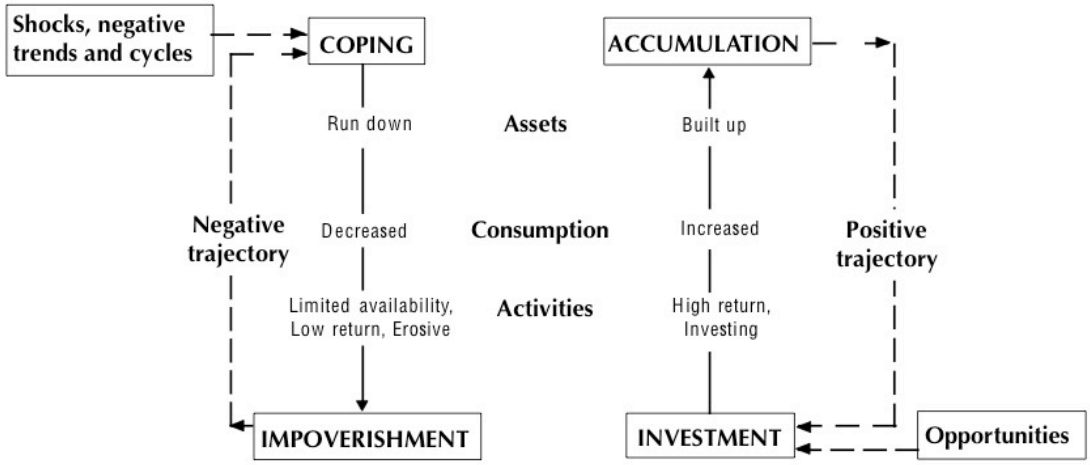
Pathways and trajectories

In order to better account for this historical perspective, recent livelihoods literature has put forward the notions of *pathways* and *trajectories*. Scoones (1998, 10) defines *livelihood pathways* as the result of a series of livelihood choices that emerge over time, or as different combinations of livelihood strategies that are pursued sequentially: "It is this dynamic element, evident in the composition and recomposition of livelihood strategies, which it is important to examine (…)". De Haan and Zoomers (2003, 2005) also emphasize the importance of distinguishing between a household's strategy and its history. While a strategy usually attains a pre-set goal, a pathway "arises out of an iterative process in a step-by-step procedure in which goals, preferences, resources and means are constantly reassessed in view of new unstable conditions" (de Bruijn and van Dijk 1998, cit. in de Haan and Zoomers 2003, 357). Thus, the notion of pathways also accounts for the influence of structural factors, because it shows "(…) that people make their own livelihoods, but not necessarily under conditions of their own choosing" (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, 43).

The term *livelihood trajectories* used by other authors describes more or less the same processes. According to Bagchi et al. (1998, 457), it "(…) refers to the consequences of the changing ways in which individuals construct a livelihood over time"[16]. Ashley et al. (2003, 2.3) emphasize the need to distinguish theoretically between short-term fluctuations and long-term trajectories, although in practice the boundaries are usually blurred. For the sake of clarity, I shall use the notion of *livelihood trajectories* in this thesis[17]. Ashley et al. (2003) argue that although they are much more complex than single responses or strategies, trajectories generally lead towards either accumulation or impoverishment; they therefore distinguish between negative and positive trajectories (see Figure 2.1).

[16] Cf. also Murray 2002.
[17] Confusion only arises when de Haan and Zoomers (2005, 43ff) use *livelihood trajectories* for their method of analyzing *livelihood pathways*.

Figure 2.1 Negative and positive livelihood trajectories (Ashley et al. 2003, 2.2)



Negative trajectories lead to a worsening of livelihoods through the gradual depletion of resources. As a result, a household may gradually lose its capability to respond to externalities such as shocks or negative trends, and may become less prepared to take advantage of new opportunities. By contrast, positive trajectories result in a gradual improvement of a household's livelihoods through the accumulation of resources. A household may thus become better prepared to cope with negative impacts and to actively respond to new opportunities. The notion of livelihood trajectories can thus help to explain patterns of household impoverishment or asset accumulation over long periods of time. At the micro level, however, the boundary between negative and positive trajectories may often appear less clear-cut and may be difficult to grasp analytically (Ashley et al. 2003).

Transition trajectories, livelihood trajectories

Nevertheless, the notion of livelihood trajectories offers a useful link between the study of livelihoods and the analysis of post-socialist transformation at the micro level. I have argued in section 2.2.2 that post-socialist transformation should be seen as a multitude of path-dependent processes: they are rooted in the socialist past, but are also shaped by a series of active decisions of various actors at all levels. The sociological transition critique has developed the notion of *transition trajectories* to account for such multiple and dynamic processes. Apparently, the notion fits in well with the idea of *livelihood trajectories*, which incorporates the dynamic nature of livelihoods, adopts a long-term perspective and takes livelihoods analysis beyond the level of particular strategies, responses and outcomes. Thus, just as post-socialist transformation may deviate from a foreseen 'transition' path, people's livelihoods may embark upon different cycles over time.

Obviously, the dynamic idea of trajectories, as well as the other concepts and notions which I deploy to analyze livelihoods and institutions in a context of post-socialist transformation and which I have outlined in this chapter, entail particular methodological decisions. These will be described in the next chapter.

3 Methodology and methods

"It is precisely the sudden importance of the micro processes lodged in moments of transformation that privileges an ethnographic approach."

(Burawoy and Verdery 1999, 2)

Most methodological decisions – to do actor-oriented, multiple-level research, to carry out a comparative case study, to adopt a historical perspective and to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods – were taken step-by-step during the early stages of my research. Most of them resulted from my theoretical approach, from already existing research and my own research questions. Others, however, were triggered by my former research experience[18] or were caused by the wider research context.

The chapter is organized as follows. In section 3.1 I describe the wider organizational context of this study and the most important research partnerships it involved. In section 3.2 I disentangle the various decisions and assumptions behind my research methodology. In section 3.3 I give an overview of the various stages of the research process and the methods related to them. Finally, I critically reflect on some practical methodical aspects in section 3.4.

3.1 Research context

This study was carried out at the Human Geography Division of the Geography Department at Zurich University, Switzerland. It is embedded within the National Centre of Competence in Research North-South (NCCR N-S), funded jointly by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Under the overarching theme of 'Research Partnerships for Sustainable Development', the NCCR N-S supports research partnerships between research institutions in Switzerland and in developing and transition countries on issues related to sustainable development. At the time of research, the NCCR N-S consisted of four 'Work Packages', each with a particular regional and thematic focus. This study forms part of Work Package 2, coordinating research on livelihood options and globalization mainly in South Asia and Central America. Since my research focused on Central Asia, I have received considerable logistical support from the Work Package 4. Besides, the study also contributed to the NCCR N-S Transversal Package Project (TPP) on Pastoral Production Systems, comparing pastoralism in West Africa and Central Asia. Continuous exchange has also taken place with the TPP on Multilocal Livelihoods.

Various research partnerships evolved from this context over the course of my study. Exchange within the TPP was particularly intensive during the early stages of research, i.e. through workshops, field excursions and joint publications on agro-pastoral production systems in Kyrgyzstan (Steimann et al. 2006; Steimann and Weibel 2007). At a later stage, three Master's students supported my research with their dissertations. The first one by Meierhans[19] (Meierhans 2008) analyzed the different ways in which local pasture users and scientists assess pasture quality in Northwest Kyrgyzstan. The second, by Schoch[20] (Schoch 2008; Schoch et al. forthcoming), looked at the links

[18] On livelihoods and institutions in the forestry sector of northwest Pakistan (Geiser and Steimann 2004; Steimann 2004, 2005)
[19] Under the Work Package 4
[20] Under the Work Package 2 and the TPP on Multilocal Livelihoods

between the two livelihood strategies of migration and animal husbandry in Southern Kyrgyzstan. The third one, by Näscher[21] (Näscher 2009; Näscher et al. forthcoming), analyzed the effects of mobility on pastoral households' vulnerability to *Brucellosis* in Central Kyrgyzstan.

During my research, the main local partner organization of NCCR N-S in Central Asia was the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP), a regional development network initiated by SDC and established by the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Berne, Switzerland in 2000. In 2008, NCCR N-S started an additional partnership with the University of Central Asia (UCA), which was founded by the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the Aga Khan Foundation in 2000. Exchange with project managers and pasture specialists at CAMP during the initial phase of my research influenced the selection of Jergetal village as one of the case study sites for my research (see below).

I also made use of my own personal networks in Kyrgyzstan for this study. Between July 2000 and April 2001, I worked with the 'Business Promotion Project', operated by the Swiss development agency Helvetas. The project worked on the development of rural tourism and this allowed me to gain some first insights into rural livelihoods and transition-related challenges, to visit different parts of the country and to establish many personal contacts. During my second stay from June to September 2001, I worked as a guide for a Swiss-Kyrgyz tour agency, accompanying Swiss tourist groups. On a private journey to Kyrgyzstan in autumn 2005, I paid a first visit to Kyzyl-Tuu, which eventually became the second case study village for this thesis (see below).

3.2 Methodology

Actor-centered research

As argued in section 2.4, I consider an actor perspective essential to understanding the manifold processes of post-socialist transformation. To this end, I decided to adopt a livelihoods perspective and to make use of the notion of *livelihood trajectories*. This means that, from a methodological point of view, my analysis works 'from the ground up', i.e. it starts with the actors at the micro level instead of official models of and normative statements about transformation processes (Nuijten 2005, 9).

According to de Haan and Zoomers (2003, 361), an analysis of people's livelihood trajectories needs to look not only at *what people have*, but especially at *what they do*, i.e. at their organizing practices and their diverse responses to different challenges and opportunities. The same authors (2005, 44) mention that the study of livelihood trajectories should "explicitly focus on matters of access to opportunities, especially mapping the workings of power". Similarly, Nuijten (2005, 9; referring to Wolf 1990) suggests to look at the 'flow of action', i.e. "to ask what is going on, why it is going on, who engages in it, with whom, when, and how often". Hence, there was no way around taking an ethnographic approach.[22]

Integration of qualitative and quantitative methods

It was nevertheless clear to me that I first had to acquire some basic knowledge about what people *have* (their *assets* in the livelihoods terminology) before inquiring what they *do*. Unfortunately, reliable statistics for the household level are scarce in the Kyrgyz Republic. Communal authorities usually keep only simple statistics for the

[21] Under the Work Package 2, the TPP on Multilocal Livelihoods and the TPP on Pastoral Production Systems

[22] Other authors arguing for an ethnographic approach to post-socialist tranformation include Burawoy and Verdery 1999, Hann et al. 2002, Kandiyoti 2002, Pavlinek 2003, Finke 2004, Herbers 2006b.

whole *ayil okmotu* (community), while there are seldom any figures at *ayil* (village) level. In order to identify those in need, households are visited every year by the communal social tax inspector, but methods of data collection are rarely transparent, and results are confidential. In addition, local statisticians often doubt their own figures, especially when it comes to livestock numbers, for the reasons explained below. Therefore, even a simple comparison between two *ayil okmotus* is hardly possible.

This is why I decided to integrate qualitative and quantitative research methods by basing my ethnographic approach upon a quantitative household survey. According to White (2002, 519), combining qualitative and quantitative work can strengthen both: "Anthropological studies can help us better understand the findings from quantitative analysis (…) [while] quantitative data [can] provide a framework to raise the questions to be addressed by qualitative approaches". Netting's (1981) famous work on alpine resource management, for instance, is an excellent example of the successful combination of the two. My motivation to combine qualitative and quantitative methods also came from my previous research experience in Northwest Pakistan (Steimann 2005), where I had conducted a quantitative baseline survey on rural livelihoods and had realized the useful yet limited scope of quantitative methods for social research.

The household as a starting point for multi-level analysis

As argued in section 2.4.1, I decided to start analysis at household level. The household seemed an appropriate unit to start with; accounts from literature and some of my own early insights prompted me to assume that the privatization of the Kyrgyz agriculture had first and foremost strengthened the household as the new main economic unit at the local level. After 1991, entitlements to private land were calculated on an individual basis, yet ownership certificates were issued jointly for whole households (see chapter 7 for a detailed account of the Kyrgyz privatization process).

The household is also a common, yet not undisputed, social category in geographical anthropological research. As Kaspar and Kollmair (2006) show, the household is not only an evident social entity providing a fundamental context of human behavior, but is also attractive from a methodological point of view, since it is visible and concrete. However, they stress that the household is not a monolithic entity but a "social construct based on dynamic norms and rules" (ibid., 118), and that any household-level research should be aware of intra-household differences between the various individuals that constitute a household. Such differences may concern the ability to take decisions or the distribution of resources; individuals within a household often have different interests, and their ability to assert themselves depends on their personal bargaining power (Berzborn 2007). Korf (2004, 278f) however argues that the term 'individual' can be misleading, too, because it suggests the idea of a person's isolation from the wider social and historical context.

Thus, households can have both elusive and clear boundaries at the same time. Werner (1998) and Kandiyoti (1999) show for the Central Asian context that households often vary in size and composition, since household members leave and join the household (e.g. through migration or the custom of child fostering). By contrast, household boundaries are also reinforced through agrarian production or the preparation and consumption of food. It is generally acknowledged that the household should thus be conceptualized as an 'embedded unit', which cannot be understood without an analysis of its social, economic and political links within and beyond a community. Such links may involve other social categories such as family, kin relations, tribal affiliations, neighborhood, or community, and special attention must be paid during analysis to local categories and their respective denominations (Werner 1998; compare 5.1.2). In addition, it is also evident that 'the household' *per se* cannot take any decisions, so terms such as 'household strategy' may be misleading.

Starting from the idea of the 'embedded household', I therefore had to scale up to other levels including the community, the regional and provincial level, but also to narrow my focus down to individual actors. On the one hand, the often mobile and multi-local character of livelihoods in rural Kyrgyzstan makes household boundaries dynamic and elusive, which made it necessary to extend my analysis beyond the local and the household level (Kandiyoti 1999, 502ff; de Haan and Zoomers 2003, 360). On the other hand, my focus on organizations, institutions and institutional change also forced me to widen my perspective. As I have detailed in section 2.3, organizations and institutions exist at or span across various levels. In accordance with Appendini and Nuijten (2002, 73), I defined the local institutional context as being "constituted by the specific manifestations of institutions and organisations in a given geographical area, even though these institutions might extend beyond the physical boundaries of that area."

The importance of the historical perspective

An exclusively household focus cannot account for the wider structural constraints and opportunities influencing livelihood trajectories, the long-term consequences of what people did and do cannot be captured through single snap-shots. The concepts employed for this study – *transformation*, *institutional change*, *organizing practices,* and *livelihood trajectories* – all describe processes, the analysis of which obviously requires a long-term perspective. The real difficulty, however, was where to draw the line. On the one hand, it was neither necessary nor practicable to go back as far as Netting (1981), who reconstructed several hundred years of demographic change to study local livelihoods in an alpine community. On the other hand, 1991 (the year when the socialist system finally collapsed) was obviously an inadequate starting point for analysis, since it would foreclose everything that happened before, which – as I soon began to realize – had a considerable effect on what happened afterwards. In order to understand this path-dependency of transformation processes better (see 2.2.2), I decided to expand my focus to the late socialist years, albeit without fixing an exact timeline. Some of the practical difficulties related to the collection of historical accounts are discussed in section 3.4.

Embedded multiple-case study

Informed by theoretical knowledge about transition trajectories, i.e. the many variations of post-socialist transformation processes, I had to assume that there is an equally countless amount of different organizing practices and diverse links with the local institutional context. It was therefore no realistic endeavor to strive for an all-encompassing description of the effects of post-socialist transformation upon rural livelihoods and institutions governing resource use. Obviously, my subject of analysis is "a complex social phenomenon", for which Yin (1994, 3) considers case study research ideal. Nuijten (2005, 9) also states that "the working of institutions and power relations can only be identified by making detailed case studies of the forms of organization around resources, conflicts or village projects." Moreover, I wanted to go beyond a mere description of the current situation by analyzing long-term processes of livelihoods and institutional change and the actors' perception of these changes. For Tellis (1997, no pagination), this merger of process *and* outcomes is one of the main strengths of case study research. I therefore decided to zoom in on particular localities to acquire what Flyvbjerg (2006, 223) calls a "nuanced view of reality".

In order to counter the frequent criticism that case study research does not allow for generalization, I decided to do an embedded multiple-case case study with strategic sampling of two main cases or units (Flyvbjerg 2006, 226f). According to Yin (1994, 41f), the embedded multiple-case study makes it possible to involve more than one unit of analysis, because it pays attention to different sub-units (or embedded units) within a case. For my analysis, I chose two Kyrgyz villages as cases (or main units), and households, groups and individuals as sub-units. I also included what Yin calls 'process units', i.e. certain locations and events such as selected pastures and meetings. The

motivation for doing a multiple-case study was to observe certain forms of organization around various resources in two different local contexts. The sampling criteria for the two villages are described in section 3.3; those for households in chapter 5.

Household typology and stratified random sampling

Rural livelihoods, natural resource use and the role of the local institutional context are complex research subjects. As chapter 4 will show, rural livelihoods in the two case study villages are not only highly diverse, but there are also considerable socioeconomic disparities between the households pursuing them. Such disparities present a serious research challenge, since they have multiple dimensions which cannot all be taken into consideration for analysis. The only way to avoid ending up with an unfeasibly large number of contexts and cases is therefore to reduce complexity by focusing on a few dimensions which seem of particular relevance for the research question and which allow meaningful comparison of cases (Flick et al. 2007, 259).

I have already restricted the focus of my analysis to a comparison of two contexts (or main units in the sense of Yin 1994), i.e. two villages. However, given the available time and workforce as well as the main focus of my research, I was neither able nor willing to achieve a statistically relevant sample size of households for a numerical generalization at the village level. In order to increase the theoretical generalizability of my findings, I therefore decided to sample a small number of cases or sub-units, i.e. households, theoretically for further analysis. As Flyvbjerg (2006, 229) notes, "the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied." In that sense, the absolute number of samples is less relevant than the diversity of cases chosen for analysis (see also Flick et al. 2007, 260; Strauss and Corbin 1996, 148ff).

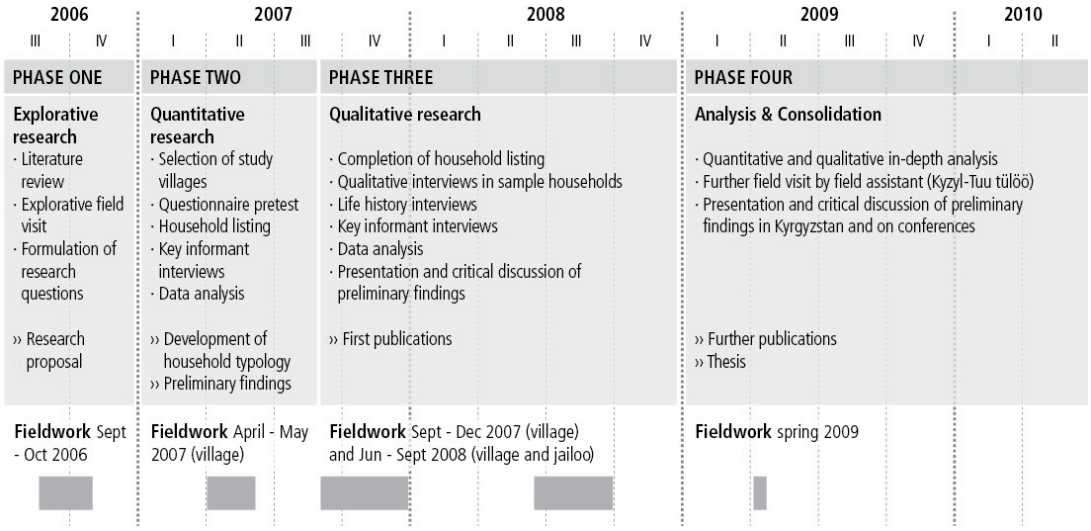
A stratified random sampling of households suited this purpose best. To this end, I used the empirical findings from the household listing (see 3.3 below) to develop a typology of households. In a first step I grouped all households together along two main dimensions determined by my research focus, i.e. livestock ownership and availability of pastoral cash income sources (see 5.3). On the one hand, the formation of such *real* or *empirical types* (Kluge 1999, 60) helps to stratify the data and allows to control the proportions falling into certain subgroups of particular interest, so as not to end up with a large number of average cases. On the other hand, a typology also allows to detect certain regularities and correlations in the data which otherwise may be overseen (ibid., 69). However, since there are many different dimensions along which cases (here: households) can be grouped and classified, any typology needs to be well considered and firmly rooted in the research questions. In a second step, I selected the five groups I considered most revealing in regard to my research questions. These five groups included the households with the most livestock of their own as well as those without any, which helped me to compare two 'extreme cases' (see above). Within each of the five groups, I then carried out a random sampling to identify the households I had to re-visit for the qualitative in-depth interviews[23]. This random element in the sampling process helped me to avoid systematic biases in the sample (Olsen 1992; Flyvbjerg 2006).

[23] Random sampling was carried out with the SPSS software.

3.3 Research design and methods

I conducted my field research for this study over a period of two-and-a-half years, from autumn 2006 until spring 2009, split into four stays, each of two to four months in duration, plus a short field visit by one of my Kyrgyz field assistants (Figure 3.1). The decision to divide my field research into several parts was mainly informed by my research question, i.e. by the seasonal variations in pasture use and the often mobile and multi-local livelihoods of the rural Kyrygz population. It was only during my research that I realized that not only do herders move constantly between different pastures and their village (which sometimes makes it difficult to track them down), but that also many people from the seemingly sedentary population were often moving between rural and urban areas, mainly due to labor migration. That is why, after a first exploratory visit, I split my field research into three seasonal slots, each dedicated to specific aspects of my overall research question and to different methodical approaches. This seasonal approach proved very useful to gain a better understanding of the agro-pastoral production cycle and of seasonal variations regarding domestic labor, migration, land cultivation and the like.

Figure 3.1 Research timeline with the four main phases of data collection and analysis (own graphic)



Phase one: explorative research

The first field visit (September to October 2006) was exploratory, dedicated to establishing first contacts with herders and key informants and to sorting out the main issues related to pasture use in the Kyrygz Republic. This was done during a research seminar organized by CAMP and on a short excursion to summer and autumn pastures in three different *oblast* (Chui, Issyk-Kul, Naryn). Interviews and group discussions were conducted, among others, with herders, local entrepreneurs, cooperative chairmen, as well as with experts in the capital Bishkek.[24] Back in Switzerland, I then refined my research questions, continued the literature review and eventually finalized the research proposal.

Phase two: quantitative household survey

The second field visit (April to May 2007) was dedicated to the selection of the case study locations and to the collection of quantitative household data. In repeated talks with experts in Bishkek, I discussed my research plan and compiled a list of potentially

[24] For a summary of this first field visit, see Steimann and Weibel 2007.

interesting case study villages. I then visited these villages one by one, talking to herders, farmers and local government representatives in order to get a first impression of the different local contexts. I also used these meetings to pre-test and adjust the questionnaire for the subsequent household listing. After selecting two villages for my case study (see below for the selection criteria), four Kyrgyz university students helped me with the initial household listing.

Based on a short quantitative household questionnaire, the listing method adapted from Strasser (2004 and 2007; see also Steimann 2005), allowed me to gain a quick overview of all households in the two case study villages and their various livelihoods. The one-page questionnaire included the main household characteristics such as the number of household members, the number and type of animals, the household's access to and ownership of arable land, its access to pastures, and its main cash income sources (see Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire). I checked the completed questionnaires on a daily basis and discussed inconsistencies with the enumerator in charge. In the case of internal contradictions or missing data, the household was revisited for clarification. We thus listed 702 households within two weeks, (see chapter 5). The household listing was complemented and put in context by local key informant interviews. After finalizing the survey, I once more talked to provincial and national experts to share and discuss some of my preliminary findings (see Appendix 4 for a list of expert interviews). Back in Switzerland, I analyzed the quantitative household data by using the SPSS package. The resulting statistical baseline for the household level eventually served to develop a typology of households (see 5.3).

Phase three: qualitative research in the study villages and on the alpine summer pastures

The focus of the third field visit (September to December 2007) was on qualitative data collection. After having visited and included those households that were not available during the spring survey, I sampled a number of households for both villages, using a stratified random sampling procedure (see 5.4). These households were then visited one by one for semi-structured, qualitative in-depth interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes and three hours, depending on the respondents' talkativeness. Though I sampled *households*, I did not sample individual *respondents* – we (my field assistant and me; see 3.4) just talked to those adult household members who were available and ready to share information. In most cases, these included either a couple with or without kids, the single male or female head of household, or another household member, such as the eldest daughter or son. In some cases, parents attended the interview together with their elder kids, which sometimes resulted in interesting discussions between two generations. The main topics discussed during these interviews included people's experience of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the privatization program and the early 1990s; their access to and use of land, livestock and pastures; and their relation to institutions and organizations at various levels (see Appendix 2 for the interview checklist). In total, I conducted 53 household interviews (see 3.4 for a discussion of the interview method).

In order to widen the historical perspective of the study, I also conducted four individual life history interviews with elderly people who were ready to speak about their life in the Soviet Union and the early years of the kolkhoz. I did not select these respondents strategically, but used the opportunity when someone was ready to talk about his life in more detail. It may be due to this arbitrary sampling procedure and my own role as a male researcher that all my life history respondents were men. I hardly moderated these talks, leaving it up to the respondents to tell their 'story'. Most of them turned out to be great storytellers and were able to recall many details as well as to relate their own story to the wider political context of their time. In this way, their biographies additionally helped me to gradually aggregate upwards from the individual

and household level to the local, regional and national level[25]. With the respondents' consent, all household and life history interviews were recorded and later transcribed into English or German. At the same time, I continued talks with key informants at local and regional level, including representatives of different state agencies, NGOs and private credit companies. Eventually, some respondents from the household interviews – both women and men – turned out to be very valuable key informants, whom I then visited repeatedly.

After another stay in Switzerland, during which I had a first look at the interview transcripts, I set off for a fourth and last field visit (July to September 2008), during which I concentrated on the herders living on the remote summer pastures of the two case study villages. Due to the huge size of these pastures, I had to concentrate on certain areas and the herding families living there (compare Maps 10.1 and 10.2). Again, semi-structured individual interviews as well as opportunistic discussion groups (O'Reilly 2005, 131f) helped to raise issues such as the herders' access and use of pastures, their possibilities to access markets, their social relations among each other and their opinion about the pasture legislation (see Appendix 3 for the detailed interview checklist). In total, I conducted 43 semi-structured interviews with herding families. In addition, I joined a two-day seminar on pasture management being held by CAMP on the summer pastures of one of the case study villages as an observer. I also revisited some of the respondents I had met in autumn 2007, and continued to discuss certain issues with key informants at local and regional level. Several interviews in the capital Bishkek with independent researchers and representatives of state departments and NGOs rounded off my data collection.

Transcription and data analysis

All recorded interviews have been transcribed and translated from Kyrgyz into English or German, depending on the field assistant's proficiency. In case I could not record an interview or a group discussion, I took notes, then wrote up minutes of the talk as soon as possible, and cross-checked with my field assistant whether I had taken down all the important issues mentioned. I then analyzed all transcripts and minutes with the help of TAMS Analyzer, an open source software package for qualitative text analysis[26]. I mainly based my qualitative text analysis on methods developed by the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1996; Charmaz 2006; Böhm 2007; Kelle 2007), starting with an open section-by-section coding of the first transcripts during my third field visit. The constantly growing number of transcripts then helped me to rethink and refine my initial codes and categories, to sort out and synthesize certain data (focused coding). At a later stage of analysis, I tested various concepts and categories stemming from my theoretical approach, such as 'uncertainty' or 'hybridity' (theoretical coding), while trying to avoid a forced imposition of these concepts on the data and my initial codes (Charmaz 2006, 66). At the same time as these different steps of coding, I used memos to comment and critically reflect my codes and categories. In many cases, these memos were also an analytical continuation of the field notes, which I used extensively during the process of data analysis.

Selection of the case study villages

As described in section 3.2, I decided to do an embedded multiple-case study, with a strategic sampling of two villages as my main cases. I intentionally did not include more than two villages, because I did not only want to compare the two different local contexts, but also to explore each of them in detail, with special attention to their subunits (households, individuals, pastures, meetings). Although I had been looking for two contrasting cases, I wanted to ensure their comparability at the macro level (climatic conditions, availability of pastures, role of the provincial administration). I

[25] On historical anthropology and life histories in general, see Francis 1992; Miller 2000; Slater 2000; Fuchs-Heinritz 2005; Goehrke 2005; O'Reilly 2005; CPRC 2006. On the use of life histories for livelihoods research, see also Bagchi et al. 1998; Messer and Townsley 2003; de Haan and Zoomers 2005.

[26] http://tamsys.sourceforge.net

therefore decided to select two villages from the same *oblast* (province). Considering my research focus, Naryn *oblast* seemed most appropriate: it has the largest total number of livestock, the largest total area of pastures, and – for climatic and topographic reasons and limited economic alternatives –animal husbandry played a highly significant role in rural livelihoods (Schuler et al. 2004)[27].

I then selected two villages in different *rayons* (districts) according to two main criteria. First, local livelihoods should differ in regard to the availability of alternatives to animal husbandry, such as crop and vegetable cultivation. Second, I was looking for two contrasting local institutional contexts. Since at this early stage of research I was able to identify this in a rather superficial way only, I decided to use the existence (or otherwise) of local NGOs, self-help groups, farming cooperatives and the like as a criterion. I thus selected the two villages Jergetal (Jergetal *ayil okmotu* (community), Naryn *rayon*) and Kyzyl-Tuu (Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, At-Bashy *rayon*) for my research. Chapter 5 describes the two villages in detail (see also Map 5.1).

3.4 Some remarks on methodology and methods

Author, student, son, donor: negotiating identities

While I tried to be as open as possible about myself and my research, I constantly encountered what O'Reilly (2005, 60) calls "the difficult distinction between covert and overt research". Heading for the field as a *PhD student*, I soon realized that depending on context and counterparts, I adopted or was given different – and often overlapping – identities. For in-depth household- and life history interviews, my research assistant often introduced me as an *author* writing a book on rural livelihoods and socioeconomic change, without mentioning every detail about my university background and the PhD program. If people wanted to know more, we gladly shared the necessary details, yet this was not always the case. Vis-à-vis local key informants – such as teachers, local government representatives, former kolkhoz managers or party leaders – we often explained my wider research context as a *PhD student*, since many of them took a lively interest and were happy to help me gain my PhD. When dealing with state representatives at regional, provincial and national level, using the term *Swiss university researcher* and disclosing my affiliations with CAMP (see 3.1) sometimes proved more successful than introducing myself as a *student*. However, this did not keep me from sometimes being accused of being a *shpion* (шпион; Russian for 'spy') when asking for access to official maps and statistics. Compared to that, being a *son* was a very convenient role: since my research assistant and I always used to stay with the same local families, we eventually became accepted as part of them. This not only opened up several opportunities to participate in life-cycle feasts, but also to join in with the hay harvest, to water the cows or to take care of the sheep. In a very few cases, this close relation to particular families proved critical to establishing new contacts. Overall, it offered me very valuable opportunities for extensive observation and participant research.[28]

Yet the most difficult aspect of negotiating my identity was to avoid being looked upon as a *donor* representative. While conducting interviews at people's homes or making small talk in the street, I was repeatedly asked about the benefits of my work for people and the community. In such cases, I always tried to explain my university background, and that I was not involved in development projects. I usually argued that

[27] Personal communication with the Naryn rayon pasture expert, 24 May 2007.

[28] The frequency of feasts rapidly increased during my stay on the summer pastures, when proving my ability to ride a horse, admire local cuisine, eat large quantities of meat and dance wildly at herders' parties became a crucial part of being accepted among herders – social control is high and news spread quickly on the summer pastures. That particular role may best be described as *maladiets* (Russian for 'capital fellow').

writing a book about their situation was all I could do, and that I was trying my best to adequately present their views and concerns. The only indirect benefit I could offer was to raise people's concerns during my discussions with state and donor representatives at the regional, provincial and national level, to which farmers and herders had only limited access. This was usually sufficient to gain people's support, but hardly ever eliminated my own unease about the issue. Another way of 'giving something back' was to take my time to answer my respondents' questions, usually about nature, farming and politics in Switzerland. This often resulted in long chats following the interviews.[29]

Doing research in a post-socialist context: nostalgia and 'the past'

During interviews I often made the experience that old and young, male and female respondents alike tended to idealize the Soviet past. I related this nostalgia to the fact that for many of them, the early years of independence were an extremely difficult time, with a rapid deterioration of living standards and the loss of guaranteed incomes and social securities. Although many have recovered since then, numerous people still live below former Soviet standards regarding nutrition, health, or education. However, since individual responsibility has become part of the new ideology, the state is neither willing nor able to adequately support them. In such a situation, current realities are often compared to the Soviet past (McMann 2005a; 2005b). During interviews I often had the impression that the harder the current realities, the brighter the Soviet ideal. Trying to figure out the differences and continuities before and after 1991, this posed a considerable challenge to me, which I could only address by constantly cross-checking information with key informants and repeatedly asking for more details about how exactly things used to be organized in the Soviet past.[30]

A related problem arose from the respondents' timing of certain events and their use of 'always' and 'in the past'. My experience was similar to Näscher's (2009, 47), who notes that people would often say that 'it had always been like this': "In the process of data collection the suspicion arose that 'always' frequently referred to the post-Soviet era only." Similarly, elderly people often referred to an undifferentiated past, in which it was difficult to distinguish between the 1960s and the 1980s. A considerable portion of many interviews was therefore devoted to putting events in a meaningful chronological order. Nevertheless, many inconsistencies may have remained.[31]

Collecting and handling sensitive data

According to Christensen (1992, 124), "information is sensitive when it can be used in a manner contrary to the interests or wishes of the informant." This became obvious during the quantitative household listing, when asking people for the number of their livestock turned out to be a delicate issue. On the one hand, livestock is a pivotal point around which social relations are established and maintained, e.g. through inviting relatives, neighbors and friends to a feast. On the other hand, livestock is a highly visible form of property, and the Kyrgyz usually measure wealth and social status by the livestock someone possesses. This holds true not only for mutual assessment among neighbors, but also for social tax inspection. When determining a household's entitlement to state child allowances, inspectors take its flock size into account. Since child allowances constitute an important cash income source for many households (see 5.2.3), the real number of animals is often concealed[32]. Chapter 6 shows that this kind

[29] See also Francis (1992, 86ff) for further thoughts on repayment and obligation in fieldwork.

[30] Kuehnast (2000) notes that Soviet nostalgia was particularly evident among women, since they were among the main recipients of the socialist welfare system. According to McMann (2005a), also many ethnic minorities express a deep sense of loss, because they additionally experience a worsening status in society.

[31] For an excellent account of how to deal with respondents' vagueness about dates and the nostalgia bias, see Francis (1992).

[32] Personal communication with social tax inspectors and statisticians, Jergetal and Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, 2007. Christensen (1992, 132) reports similar problems for West Africa.

of camouflage was widely practised in Soviet times, even though the reasons for deceiving the state administration were somewhat different back then. In order to address the problem, every respondent was informed about the research project and assured of full confidentiality. It proved especially important to tell people that the local tax inspector had no access to the data we collected. But also some key informants had to be assured of confidentiality, especially if they shared knowledge about informal practices of others or themselves. I therefore decided not to mention any names in this thesis unless my respondents explicitly allowed me to do so. This is why most quotes are only labeled with the respondent's affiliation to a particular household group (compare 5.4), as well as with an internal household identification number[33]. In the few cases I tell personalized stories, I use pseudonyms. By contrast, I follow the general rule of naming most public officials since they can in any case be easily identified by their function (Guenther 2009).

Another problem related to the household listing method is that its quick and short character makes it impossible to collect and consistently cross-check data at the same time (see also Strasser 2004). I addressed this problem at a later stage of research when I revisited some of the households for qualitative in-depth interviews. During these interviews, livestock numbers and income sources were discussed again and compared with the listing results. In most cases, these cross-checks confirmed our data.

The qualitative interviews also often touched upon other sensitive issues such as poverty, credits, health problems, or conflicts with neighbors and local authorities. Besides assuring full confidentiality, I tried to address this by moderating the interviews as openly as possible, trying to follow the respondents' narrative, while an interview checklist helped me to raise the sensitive aspects when I felt the time was right. My usual opener was about the respondents' life in Soviet times, a topic which often proved to be an excellent 'icebreaker', since it did not directly touch on people's current livelihoods. While some talks turned rather personal or even emotional after some time, other respondents remained tight-lipped. Another challenge was to deal with neighbors joining the conversation after a while, which often completely altered the character of the interview – not necessarily for the worse, however, as some interviews thus turned into excellent group discussions. According to tradition, most respondents invited us for tea after the interview and took the opportunity to ask me about Switzerland. Sometimes, these chats turned back to local issues after a while, which was a splendid opportunity to raise sensitive topics again in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Translator, transcriber, counterpart

Having hardly any knowledge of the Kyrgyz language myself, I had to work with translators. All in all, I worked with four different translators for this study, all of them women. This was not only due to their changing availability for long-time field research, but also because at a later stage of research, translation and transcription of in-depth interviews required different skills and more experience than conducting a household survey. The translation of interviews has undoubtedly caused some imprecision in my data. In-depth interviews were conducted in Kyrgyz and recorded with the respondents' consent. Expert interviews were either recorded or noted down, depending on the respondent's consent. During the interview, my field assistant continuously summarized people's responses for me. With very talkative respondents, this sometimes proved rather difficult and getting the full meaning of what people said was not always possible during the talk.

The subsequent transcription and translation (into English or German, depending on the assistant's proficiency) took much more time than initially expected, especially

[33] Respondents from the two villages are labeled e.g. [1a17], designating district, quarter and household number. This system does not reflect administrative divisions, so outsiders cannot retrace a respondent. Herding households interviewed on the summer pastures of *Arpa* and *Kumbel* are labeled e.g. [#012], designating the order of interviews.

in the beginning, when the transcription rules and the translation of key terms had to be negotiated between me and my field assistant. Even then, sorting out misunderstandings and avoiding imprecisions in the transcripts took several months – a process, however, that also helped me to reflect on methodological issues and the everyday use of certain terms by various respondents. Thus, my field assistants played a key role in putting things in context. Their cultural and linguistic expertise often helped me to understand local customs and linguistic peculiarities better, and they were essential and critical counterparts to constantly discuss, challenge and complement my findings and interpretations. Last but not least, it was they who usually established the first contacts with respondents and key informants. Since all my assistants were women, they were particularly valuable door-openers to the many female respondents, as well as in the context of our (mostly female-headed) host families in the two villages and on the *jailoos*.

4 Political and economic reforms and the agrarian sector in socialist and post-socialist Kyrgyzstan

On August 31, 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic offcially gained independence from the Soviet Union. However, the country's dependence on subsidies from Moscow and its full integration into the all-Union market meant the Kyrgyz did not actively demand independence, but rather experienced it as a 'burden of imposed independence' (Mangott 1996). It soon became clear that the Kyrgyz economy was completely unprepared for the huge challenges of sovereignty and political and economic independence. The direct and indirect transfers and subsidies from Moscow quickly dried up, and the uncontrolled hyperinflation of the Russian ruble had a devastating effect. Arrears were rapidly accumulating between firms and states, not least because efforts to establish a functioning clearing system among the new countries had failed. The Kyrgyz industrial sector was hit immediately and particularly hard; between 1991 and 1994, it decreased by nearly 60% (Stadelbauer 1996, 503). Agricultural production was similarly affected, since central subsidies to state and collective farms ceased to exist as did the fodder supplies so crucial to collectivized stock raising (Duncan 1994; Gumpel 1997; Abazov 1999; UNDP 2005a). The new Kyrgyz government therefore had little time to decide on its policy direction. There was no uniform approach across Central Asia: while the governments of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan relied on state-led development and a gradual approach to cope with the economic crisis, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan opted for a swift change away from central planning towards market-led economic development. The fact that Russia soon embarked on its own 'shock therapy' certainly influenced the Kyrgyz government's decision to speed up its reforms as well (Abazov 1999, 200ff).

Since then, the two guiding principles of privatization and decentralization have by and large informed the Kyrgyz reform agenda. These principles emanated to a considerable extent from conditionalities tied to the significant financial support the young republic received from the international donor community under the guidance of the World Bank and the IMF after 1991. However, the profound changes and simultaneous reworking of the economic, political and social sphere did not begin with the inauguration of the first independent government and the arrival of Western policy advisors. Much of what was implemented after 1991 had already been laid out in the late 1980s, when the Gorbachev administration tried to 'rebuild' the Soviet economy and open up it somewhat sclerotic society. There is therefore little point in seeking to identify the exact threshold between the last Soviet and the first Kyrgyz reforms, since this would disregard the many levels on which the latter are an extension of the former.

In this chapter I describe the most important reform steps undertaken in the Kyrgyz SSR and the Kyrgyz Republic since the late 1980s, with a special focus on agrarian reforms. I do so to outline the formal aspects of the institutional and organizational context as well as the macroeconomic context in which rural Kyrgyz have had to make their living over the last 20 to 30 years. The chapter is organized as follows: Section 4.1 describes the economy of the Kyrgyz SSR in the 1980s, the development of the collectivized livestock production, and gives a short summary of Gorbachev's *perestrojka* in the agrarian sector. Section 4.2 describes the main principles and measures of the Kyrgyz transition politics after 1991, discusses its main effects on macroeconomic development and shows where 20 years of transition policy have taken the country. Section 4.3 then focuses on agrarian reforms since 1991. It explains the evolution of the legal framework for the dissolution of collective farms, the passage of modern land laws and the regulatory framework for the management and use of pastures, and outlines the reforms' effects on the agrarian sector. Finally, particular

attention is paid to the recent reforms of the legal and organizational framework for pasture use and management.

4.1 The Kyrgyz economy in the 1980s and early agrarian reforms

4.1.1 Socialist economics in the 1980s

By the late 1980s, the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (Kyrgyz SSR) was one of the poorest Soviet Republics. While Soviet heavy industry was mainly located in the Slavic western part of the USSR, a considerable part of Kyrgyz industry – metallurgy, machinery and light industry (mainly textiles) – had been built out of strategic rather than economic reasons in order to strengthen the Soviet Union's remote border regions. Therefore, the Kyrgyz SSR –like other Central Asian Republics (CARs) – mainly served as a source of raw materials for the Union's economy as a whole, namely wool, meat and crops, as well as uranium, gold and mercury. The republic's economy was therefore predominantly agrarian, with a particular focus on livestock production (see 4.1.2). Most Kyrgyz transport infrastructure had been developed only to serve the production and export of raw materials. This high structural dependency of the Soviet periphery on the center resulted in all CARs being relatively under-developed. By the late 1980s, there was a comparatively high proportion of people living below the official poverty line (33% in the Kyrgyz SSR in 1989), and the primary sector retained much of its importance (Duncan 1994; Stadelbauer 1996; Gumpel 1997; Spoor 1999 and 2004; Schmidt 2006).

Population growth and rural unemployment

Between 1926 and 1989, Kyrgyzstan's population had quadrupled from 1 million to 4.3 million people. This growth rate was similar to that of neighboring republics and was mainly caused by the influx of migrants, especially from European Russia. During most of the 20th century, ethnic Kyrgyz were but a small minority in their own capital (Huskey 1995, 814f). The proportion of Russians, Germans, Tatars and other nationalities was lower in rural areas however, and only very few non-ethnic Kyrgyz lived in Naryn *oblast* in Soviet times. Nevertheless, rural areas suffered from an increasing rate of under- and unemployment. On the one hand, Moscow was reluctant in the 1980s to create new, labor-intensive industries in Central Asia; instead, the administration aimed at improving the efficiency of the existing industries. On the other hand, rural out-migration to cities remained low. According to Patnaik (1995), ethnic and cultural reasons dissuaded rural people from moving to the Russian-dominated urban centers, although industrial wages were higher and the industry still suffered from labor shortage.

The 'second' economy

As the central administration showed no interest in developing processing industries and creating new income opportunities in rural areas, there was a rise in the importance of informal incomes. These were mainly generated through the so-called 'second' (informal or unofficial) economy that developed alongside and within the centrally planned economy. Informal economic activity was widespread in all sectors, but especially pronounced in the agricultural sector. This not only included various forms of food production (small-scale cultivation and animal husbandry), but also construction and repair work, unofficial taxi services and the like (Verdery 2002, 5). Its most developed forms were found in the southern USSR, namely Azerbaijan, Georgia and the CARs. Efforts by the Khrushchev administration in the 1960s to fight private economic activity – for instance through the mass dismissal of farm leaders and

dispatching hundreds of thousands of party members into farm management jobs – yielded few results (C.Z. 1959). Instead, the formal and informal economies developed a symbiosis: state firms unintentionally subsidized the second economy (since the latter nearly always utilized materials from the former), while the second economy balanced the failures of the state economy (Verdery 2002, 5). Many state enterprises and cooperatives practised double-entry bookkeeping, producing both for the state and the private market. In 1988, the resulting losses for the centralized state economy were estimated at about 40% of total economic performance (Stadelbauer 1996, 109; Ronsijn 2006). Besides the 'second economy' there were other informal sources of income from bribes or from the embezzlement of public resources by party officials and others who had the opportunity to do so. According to Grossman (1989; cit. in Kandiyoti 1999, 514), such informal income was more prevalent in rural areas than in towns and cities.

Box 4a Socialist economics: rational redistribution and allocative power

Socialist economies – at least before the first radical reforms in the second half of the 20th century – generally suppressed the market principle; instead, they based their basic mode of exchange on the principle of redistribution. Everyone had the right to work, while the state claimed the sole right to redistribute the produced wealth as welfare for all. Productive resources were therefore owned and controlled by the public, while the product was centrally appropriated and then reallocated along lines set by the central state, i.e. the party. The key instrument for production, appropriation and redistribution was the five-year plan (Nee 1989; Verdery 2002).

The central legitimating principle of the socialist economy was therefore 'rational redistribution', i.e. the argument that the state was best placed to collect and redistribute resources in a fair and just manner. In this system, strengthening the bureaucracy's capacity to allocate (but not necessarily the amounts to be allocated) was a means of maximizing power. Consequently, Verdery (1991) defines 'allocative power' as the basic law of motion of any socialist economy. This also explains why the Soviet state attempted to regulate private small-scale production strongly, e.g. through the *kontrakt* system (see 6.3).

As a result, Soviet agriculture was vertically organized and an integral part of a system of processing and distribution chains scattered all over the USSR. This not only entailed large capital investments and transfers from the secondary to the primary sector, but also the heavy subsidization of input prices such as fuel, seeds and the like (Kerven 2003b, 22).

4.1.2 Collectivized livestock production in the Kyrgyz SSR

The rural Kyrgyz SSR was predominantly agrarian and specialized in livestock production for the all-Union market. By 1990, agriculture accounted for 33.6% of the republic's GDP, one third of the Kyrgyz labor force was engaged in the agrarian sector, and livestock accounted for 57% of Kyrgyz agricultural production (ADB 2001; Lerman et al. 2003, 1003). Collectivized stock-raising in the Kyrgyz SSR[34] started in the late 1920s, when livestock owners were forced to hand over their animals to the newly established kolkhozes[35]. At first, this confiscation of livestock met fierce resistance among the Central Asian population, often leading to violent conflicts. Many people preferred to slaughter their animals rather than hand them over to the Soviet administration. Others decided to drive their animals to China. The result was a severe drop in livestock numbers in Soviet Central Asia in the 1930s.[36] Even by 1940,

[34] Kyrgyzstan was officially transformed into a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1936. Between 1926 and 1936, it had the status of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) and was still part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) (Prokhorov 1982).

[35] Chapter 6 explains the functioning of collective farms [Russ. *kolkhoz*] in detail.

[36] Brill Olcott (1981) estimates that between 1928 and 1932, more than 1.5 million people died in Kazakhstan and nearly 80% of all livestock.

livestock numbers had not yet recovered to pre-collectivization levels (Holdsworth 1952; Brill Olcott 1981; Stadelbauer 1996).

Despite these setbacks, the socialist administration soon started to gradually replace the traditional fat-tailed sheep with wool breeds. Collectivized livestock production made use of certain elements of nomadic grazing systems such as seasonal pastures and annual migratory cycles, but with the goal of rapidly increasing the number of animals. Whereas in pre-Soviet times most families engaged in transhumance tended their own flock, kolkhozes employed a few professional herders to look after the farm's livestock. Like all other economic production, pasture management and livestock production was planned according to centrally defined five-year plans (Brill Olcott 1981; Dienes 1975; van Veen 1995; Undeland 2005).

By 1960, the number of sheep and goats had doubled compared to 1916 figures and the number of cattle had also exceeded pre-revolutionary levels (Figure 4.1). Fine-fleeced and semi-fine-fleeced sheep now made up 90 percent of kolkhoz flocks. In order to constantly increase livestock and pasture productivity, the state developed scientific pasture improvement techniques, including aerial surface seeding and fertilization. In addition, collective farms were requested to intensify cultivation and storage of their own fodder crops. Despite these efforts, however, the Kyrygz livestock sector became increasingly dependent on feed and fodder imports from other Soviet republics (Dikambaev 1960, 13; Undeland 2005, 48).

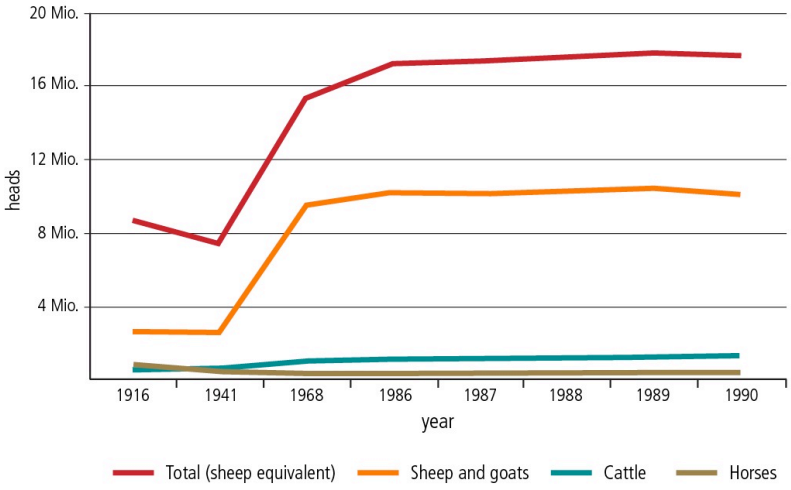


Figure 4.1 Development of livestock populations in the Kyrgyz SSR (Farrington 2005, 174)

But the rapid growth of the livestock sector had a detrimental effect on pastures. By the early 1960s, permanent overstocking had already become common practice, resulting in severe pasture degradation and a sharp decline in pasture dry matter production throughout the republic. By 1989, animal population levels were estimated at two to three times the maximum stocking capacity of winter, spring and autumn pastures (Fitzherbert 2000; Farrington 2005, 174; Undeland 2005, 45).

4.1.3 Pre-independence reforms: *perestrojka* and the Kyrgyz agriculture

In the late 1980s, Soviet food production was no longer able to satisfy people's qualitative expectations, nor could it fulfil their quantitative requirements anymore. Confronted with these obvious shortcomings, the new Gorbachev-Ryzhkov administration officially acknowledged the balancing function of the 'second economy' and tried to strengthen the agrarian sector by partially formalizing private production through the *perestrojka* reforms. Thus, to some extent, *perestrojka* paved the way for

many of the economic reforms carried out by the Kyrgyz government after 1991 (Wegren 1992).

Strengthening private agrarian production and marketing (late 1980s)

Until the late 1980s, only individuals had the right to sell products privately on so-called kolkhoz markets [Kyrg. *bazaar*], while private enterprises did not. Instead, they had to deliver all their production to the state, which was in charge of redistribution. It was only in the last years of the USSR that *perestrojka* authorized the emergence of the first independent cooperatives and private enterprises. They were given the right to sell part of their production independently and at market prices, while the rest had to be delivered to the state at fixed prices. On the one hand, this 'dual pricing system' helped to create new rural markets, so that the number of *bazaars* in Kyrgyzstan increased by nearly 40 percent between 1980 and 1989. On the other hand, however, the measure more than ever allowed profit-seeking groups to sell state-subsidized goods at market prices, which had an adverse effect on the state economy. Finally, by 1991 it had become clear that only a single pricing system could help to solve these inconsistencies (Abazov 1999, 205).

In order to increase the productivity of all-Union agriculture, the government also tried to create new incentives for individual farmers. This however meant limiting the powers of local and regional bureaucrats who had resisted all local initiatives up to this point. In principle, *perestrojka* offered two *de facto* ways of establishing an individual farm. The first possibility was the so-called 'family contract' – a contract on production tasks signed voluntarily between the kolkhoz management and a group of farm workers. To fulfill the contract, these workers were entitled to use the assets of the kolkhoz such as arable land and equipment. The second possibility was to lease land from the kolkhoz for private production. However, such early land share arrangements usually existed purely on paper and were not physically demarcated (Ronsijn 2006).

First legal conceptualization of agrarian reforms (1991 – 1994)

In October 1990, Askar Akaev was elected the first president of the – formally not yet independent – Kyrgyz Republic. Akaev, "a USSR people's deputy and a champion of Gorbachev's policies of measured reform" (Huskey 1995, 813) then united all those in favor of radical reforms to push *perestrojka* further. In early 1991, his government already passed a first legal basis for land reforms. The two laws 'On Peasant Farms' (February 2, 1991) and 'On Land Reform' (April 19, 1991) paved the way for the creation of private peasant farms. As a result, land commissions were established at kolkhoz level; they were responsible for the distribution of land-use shares to private farms. For the time being, however, restructuring was only permitted in inefficient collective and state farms and it remained completely voluntary; the law only obliged the farm management to allocate land-use rights to individuals or households wishing to establish their own peasant farm (Stadelbauer 1996; Giovarelli 1998; Eriksson 2006). In addition, all transfers of land-use rights – except inheritance – were strictly forbidden. On the one hand, peasant farms stood to profit from very favorable conditions, as they were entitled to access markets and receive state inputs and credits at the same conditions as a kolkhoz. On the other hand, however, they had to fulfill numerous obligations, such as using the farmland in a prescribed manner and issuing labor contracts to workers at the same conditions as the kolkhoz. According to Duncan (1994, 86), such legal constraints revealed the state's still ambiguous attitude to private trade: "Overall policy permit it, but a raft of regulations covering prices, taxes, entry into trade, and movements and exports severely restricts it. (…) there is clearly a pro-production, anti-trade bias in the minds of most policy-makers (…)."
This and other administrative hurdles may have been the reason that mainly leading and specialized kolkhoz personnel – accountants, veterinarians, and brigadiers – seized the opportunity to start their own peasant farms, while ordinary workers often lacked the necessary capital or practical knowledge to do so. In addition, the existing

agricultural infrastructure was designed for large-scale farming under the Soviet command system, and did not suit the requirements of small farming units. Since legal hurdles excluded purchasing land from others in order to create farms large enough for efficient management and production, the effectiveness of this first step towards a privatized agriculture was rather limited. By 1994, only some 10,000 private farms had grown out of Kyrygz kolkhozes (Jones 2003, 263). Thus, the state was less and less able to offer competitive prices for agricultural goods, to pay on time or to provide the necessary agricultural inputs. Consequently, some kolkhozes and farmers started to ignore state orders in order to sell and barter goods on the private market, often against fuel or fertilizers (Bloch et al. 1996; Stadelbauer 1996; Trouchine and Zitzmann 2005; Ronsijn 2006).

4.2 Independence and the Kyrgyz transition agenda

4.2.1 Akaev's reform program: liberalize, deregulate, privatize

Soon after gaining formal independence in August 1991, the Kyrgyz government under president Akaev embarked upon radical reforms, which were supposed to lead to "one of the most radical programs of privatization in the region, (…) [and] one of the most liberal economic regimes (…)" (Abazov 1999, 218). The government quickly adopted the structural reform measures promoted by the international donor community[37] through conditional loans and grants. Working on the basis of the Washington Consensus (compare 2.1), international policy advisors promoted a 'shock therapy' i.e. a swift, market-led transition consisting of an immediate liberalization of prices, the privatization of most state property, and the withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere (Kerven 2003b; Trouchine and Zitzmann 2005). A gradual approach was ruled out from the very beginning, as most leading international advisors were convinced that recovery from the unavoidable fall of output and rise of unemployment "should be (…) under way in two years or so" (IMF, IBRD, OECD, EBRD 1990, cit. in Abazov 1999, 199). The reforms of the Akaev administration thus pursued three main objectives:

a) Internal and external price liberalization

The decision was soon taken to liberalize almost 90% of prices and to maintain state subsidies only for bread, meat, coal and public transportation. As a result, living conditions rapidly deteriorated, so that the state had to intervene again in 1993. The donor community then pressurized the Kyrgyz government into liberalizing prices again; this was in 1994. Nearly all limitations on imports to and exports from Kyrgyzstan were then eliminated (Duncan 1994; Abazov 1999, 205ff).

b) Macroeconomic stabilization and introduction of national currency

At independence, Kyrgyzstan still belonged to the ruble zone, having neither an own currency nor an independent banking system. When prices were liberalized, the republic lost control over its economy and inflation skyrocketed (Abazov 1999, 206). To regain control, Kyrgyzstan was the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to leave the ruble zone and introduced its own currency in May 1993. The immediate effect of the Kyrgyzstani *Som* (KGS) on the economy was adverse however, and the severe economic crises in Kazakhstan and Russia – at the time the two main markets for Kyrgyz products – further aggravated the situation. In 1993, the Kyrgyz GDP was estimated at US $680, among the lowest in the CIS. After

[37] At that time mainly represented by the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

1995, however, the *Som* developed into one of the most stable currencies in the region, and macroeconomic stabilization was achieved by 1996-97. Inflation had stabilized by 1996 and this also attracted the first wave of foreign investment (Bloch et al. 1996; Abazov 1999).

c) Privatization and restructuring of the economy

Kyrgyzstan was the first of the Central Asian Republics to systematically privatize state property and deregulate the economy. But the introduction of a new currency, spiraling inflation, lack of capital or credit resources for newly privatized enterprises, and economic stagnation in other CIS countries made it a very long and tedious process lasting throughout the 1990s. Nevertheless, 41% of both the agricultural and the industrial sectors were already privatized between 1991 and 1993. By mid-1995, the Akaev administration had privatized more than 64% of all state property – faster than any other Central Asian Republic (Abazov 1999).

Despite these efforts and massive financial aid from multilateral and bilateral donors, by 1995 the Kyrgyz GDP had dropped to 53% of the 1990 level. As a response, the president temporarily suspended privatization by a special decree in May 1997, but resumed it in 1998, now turning to the energy, telecommunication and mining industries. By the end of the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan had privatized most of the former state enterprises in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors (Gumpel 1997; Abazov 1999; UNDP CBS 2005).

4.2.2 Decentralization of governance and the state administration

In the Kyrgyz SSR, local government consisted of Local Councils of People's Deputies[38] at various levels, with the Supreme Soviet at their top. These councils were only really of a formal nature, and did little more than to implement central policies and programs. After independence, local government structures were therefore reformed along the three main tiers *oblast* (province), *rayon* (district) and *ayil okmotu* (community). The politico-administrative reforms at the local level went hand-in-hand with economic reforms, i.e. the dismantling of state and collective farms (see 4.3). This simultaneity made the local organizational framework of the 1990s fairly complex, with many overlapping actors, institutions and organizations (Giovarelli 1998; Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003).

Development of new local government structures

The Law on Local Self-Government and Local Public Administration, adopted on 19 April 1991 first transferred government powers to the still existing Local Councils at the local (i.e. kolkhoz) level. However, in the absence of sufficient financial transfers from central government, they were virtually powerless to carry out the functions of local self-government (Wolters 2006, 3). In March 1992 therefore, the government adopted an amendment to the law to introduce a dual system. The new approach divided up local legislative and executive functions and powers between a local council and a rural executive committee. This dual principle was eventually officialized in the 1993 constitution. It was only in August 1994, though, that the local community and its organizational, legal, financial and economic foundations were formally endorsed by presidential decree (issued 22 Aug 1994; cf. Appendix 5).

In the beginning, the **local executive**, initially called 'rural committee' was placed under the authority of the *rayon* administration. The *rayon* could thus appoint the committee's director as well as his deputy, who in turn appointed the other committee members. Needless to say, this meant that the new committees by and large reproduced socialist power structures at *rayon* and local level, so that most of them consisted of former kolkhoz chairmen, their accountants and other specialists, who were not always

[38] Also known as Local Soviet of People's Deputies.

Figure 4.2 After 1991, the former club of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz was ransacked and even the wooden floor disappeared. Today, the ruined building is one of the few items which remained in municipal ownership. Ironically, the *ayil okmotu* still employs a person to guard the club (photo by the author, 2008).

very supportive of the central government's reform plans (Bloch 1996, 89f). In January 1995, the national government therefore disempowered the local committees once more, replacing them with new committees responsible for implementing land reforms and reorganizing agricultural enterprises. In April 1996, another presidential decree finally abolished the rural committees, making way for the establishment of new rural executive committees [Kyrg. *ayil okmotu*], with an elected head of *ayil okmotu* (Giovarelli 1998; Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003).

The first elections for the **local legislative**, i.e. local councils [Kyrg. *ayil kengesh*] were held in October 1994. These finally replaced the former Local Councils of People's Deputies. However, since there was no concept of communal property at the time, the new *ayil kengeshs* had practically no power. It was only after a national referendum held on February 10, 1996 that local councils were given ownership rights over local property (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003). Communal property was itself only recognized as a constitutional form of ownership after a national referendum held on October 17, 1998. By that point, many former kolkhozes had already distributed or sold most of their valuable infrastructure such as machines and barns, and many public buildings had been ransacked by the people for construction materials (compare Figure 4.2). Consequently, it was mainly objects requiring substantial investment that remained in municipal ownership such as schools, healthcare institutions, kindergartens, libraries, clubs, and sports facilities (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003).

Local government structures today

Ayil kengesh literally means 'local council'. It represents the legislative on the territory of a community, which may consist of several villages [Kyrg. *ayil*]. Deputies are elected by local inhabitants by a direct ballot for a term of four to five years, and meet once a quarter. The *ayil kengesh*'s jurisdiction is exclusively local; it can make decisions on the management of municipal property and can issue normative acts that local inhabitants must comply with (Ibraimova 2009, 62f).

Ayil okmotu literally means 'village government', and it has two main functions: first, to implement decisions made by the *ayil kengesh*, for which the *ayil okmotu* is accountable to the *ayil kengesh*; and second, to carry out delegated state powers, e.g. keeping local level statistics, renting out community land and pastures, and issuing pensions and allowances. For this, the *ayil okmotu* is accountable to the head of the

rayon administration [Kyrg. *rayon akim*]. The head of the *ayil okmotu* is the highest official in the territorial jurisdiction of a community. He or she is elected for a five-year term through communal elections and must be approved by the chairman of the *rayon* council and by the *ayil kengesh* [39] (Ibraimova 2009, 63f). Today, most people use the term *ayil okmotu* indiscriminately for the political entity (community), the municipal administration and the administration building, as well as for the head of the rural executive committee.

The Akaev government has also created room for various bodies of local self-governance below the *ayil okmotu* and the *ayil kengesh*. Rural communities have the right to form ***territorial bodies of public self-governance*** **(TPS)** to engage in social and economic communal development. A TPS must be registered as a private association with the *ayil kengesh*, which can then delegate certain functions or municipal property to the TPS.

Several forms of traditional self-governance were formalized in the mid-1990s. The ***kurultai*** (open village assembly) can be called upon people's request and can submit recommendations to the *ayil kengesh*. ***Aksakal*** **councils** – elder men's councils[40] – play an important role in social control and decision-making at communal level. *Aksakal* councils already existed in pre-colonial times, but the Soviet authorities limited their powers to conducting moral instruction of the public and making recommendations to the local state representatives (Geiss 2008, 240; Ibraimova 2009, 68). Today, they have the right to resolve minor conflicts at communal level through so-called ***aksakal*** **courts**, local arbitration courts. The cases they deal with include conflicts between individuals over land or rental fees and the settlement of divorce disputes. The court usually tries to solve a case within ten days and then sends a report to the *rayon*. If a case cannot be settled, the *aksakals* may ask the regional court for assistance. The *ayil okmotu* also has the possibility to take defaulters to the *aksakal* court. *Aksakals* are elected by public ballot every three years[41]. **Women's councils** have the same status as *aksakal* councils, but usually have less influence at the communal level (Temirkuolov 2004; Ibraimova 2009, 67f). Other forms of local self-government include local **self-help groups** [Kyrg. *jamaat*], village development organizations, as well as associations of resource users. The latter – e.g. Water and Pasture Users' Associations – are usually initiated by external development organizations; they will be discussed in more detail in the chapters 8 and 9.

Communal revenues and expenditure

Communal budget revenues consist mainly of local taxes on private and leased arable land as well as on pasture lease fees. There are also local taxes stipulated by the National Tax Code (e.g. on vehicles, tourism, or hunting and fishing), and deductions from national taxes and other revenues such as fines and surcharges. Land taxes usually represent the main source of communal revenues, while the collection of local taxes is hardly ever worthwhile for municipal administrations as revenue is often insignificant compared to the considerable organizational effort needed to calculate and collect them (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003; Young 2005). As for the deductions from national taxes, communities receive a *de jure* share of 35% but often receive less due to arbitrary decisions by higher authorities. According to Abazov (1999, 214), tax collection remains one of the most serious problems of the Kyrgyz state, which also experienced a steep decline in tax revenues in the 1990s.

More than 60% of local expenditure is on wages for *ayil okmotu* staff; 22% are allocations to the *SozFond* (social fund), while the remainder includes expenditure on municipal services, transport and equipment. In short, local revenues are often just

[39] In recent years, the rules for the election or appointment of a head of *ayil okmotu* have changed several times.
[40] *Aksakal* literally translates as 'white beard' and is also used to address elder men.
[41] Personal communication with the head of the Jergetal *aksakal* court, 27 October 2007

sufficient to pay local government and administration staff[42]. According to Alymkulov and Kulatov (2003, 559), problems are endemic "to resolve issues of financing for the maintenance of municipal facilities, including water supply, roads and bridges, the surrounding environment and others".

Communal responsibilities regarding local development

Despite the chronic shortage of funds at communal level, various functions have been devolved down from national and oblast authorities to *ayil okmotu* level since 1996. On paper, communal responsibilities include education (except teachers' salaries, which are covered out of the national budget), social protection (calculation of entitlements to and distribution of pensions, child and other special allowances), healthcare (including first aid and partial financing of local hospitals), maintenance of municipal services and infrastructure (including electricity and water supply, roads, lighting, clubs, waste disposal etc.) and environmental protection. The latter includes the protection of pastures and the maintenance of related infrastructure, such as bridges and watering points. Since many *ayil okmotus* generate only meager revenues and have few additional financial means, they often fulfill only the most important tasks – pasture management and maintenance are seldom among their top priorities (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003; Young 2005).

Persisting confusion and personality politics

All in all, as Alymkulov and Kulatov (2003, 529) note, the Kyrgyz government was very quick to begin reforming local government structures, yet from the outset lacked a clear plan of how to do this. As a result, the legislative process to formalize local government in the Kyrgyz Republic and define the exact roles of *ayil kengesh* and *ayil okmotu* often lagged behind changes at local level. Eventually, this uneven development has left many of the new communal institutions in a rather weak position. It also seems that recent attempts to reform the local government structures further have led to considerable confusion between different state levels as to their precise responsibilities and the future division of taxes. Wolters (2006, 10) therefore describes the structural landscape of the Kyrgyz local government as "a conglomerate of different steps of implementation" (author's translation).

At the same time, local politics have remained largely based on personality. Both oblast governors and rayon *akims* are not elected democratically but appointed by the Kyrgyz president and the central government. This has fostered clientelism and patronage, since state representatives often feel more accountable to their superiors than to the inhabitants of their rayon or oblast (Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003). This is further exacerbated by tribal and family structures, which lead many politicians to appoint or employ their kin. However, as Libman (2008, 5), notes "although one can hardly claim that traditional clans play no role in the administrations of Central Asian countries, it is probably necessary not to overestimate their importance". However, the high degree of personalization in local politics again became apparent in April 2010, when after the ousting of President Bakiev, many *oblast* governors, rayon *akims*, and *ayil okmotu* heads were instantly replaced[43].

4.2.3 Macroeconomic development and recent reform adjustments

By the end of the 1990s, a large portion of the Kyrgyz economy had been privatized, and formal decentralization of government structures had been substantially implemented. However, for much of the 1990s, the Akaev government had been unable to effectively tackle economic recession, to respond to growing socioeconomic disparities, and to counter mass impoverishment of the population. As a result,

[42] Personal communication, *ayil okmotu* staff, Kyzyl-Tuu, 22 May 2007.
[43] Personal communication, Rustam Tashtanov, Kyrgyz Academy of Science, 23 April 2010.

Kyrgyzstan experienced one of the severest economic recessions of all the CARs. It lasted for six consecutive years until 1996 and came as a surprise to many observers.

The social costs of reform

Obviously, the social costs of shock therapy were far higher than expected, taking the form of unemployment, poverty and social polarization. The industrial production declined heavily, leading to a rapid de-industrialization and mass unemployment. Many of those who lost their jobs in the industry moved into trade. The curtailing of the welfare safety net caused a further rise of poverty. By 1996, around 71% of the population lived below the official national poverty line (Abazov 1999, 215). Old people and women were the worst affected, because social welfare institutions such as kindergartens, paid maternity leave and old-age pensions were cut back or done away with altogether (UNDP CBS, 11). At that time, the persistence of the former *kolkhoz* markets and the *ogorod* more than ever protected the (rural) Kyrgyz population from famine.

In 1998, the recession finally ended and the economy began to recover. Although the state remained heavily indebted, Kyrgyzstan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose from 34 billion KGS in 1998 to 75 billion KGS in 2002 (Kerven 2003b). Also the share of people living below the official poverty line decreased from 71% in 1996 to 41% in 2003 – although this was still way above the official 1989 level (33%). In addition, rural poverty ratios were consistently about 50% above urban levels, and income inequalities had become particularly apparent in rural areas (GovtKG 2001; Quigley 2004; UNDP 2005). Spoor (2004, 34) also observed a "deepening feminization of poverty", which he related to job losses in the health and education sector and the cutbacks in formerly state-sponsored child-related support services. Yet while there was an undeniable increase in poverty rates, the question as to whether income *inequalities* really increased after 1991 or just became more visible remains controversial (cf. Henderson et al. 2005 and 2008). I will take up that discussion again towards the end of this thesis.

As a reaction to these developments, and in virtue of an altered development paradigm of the international donor community (compare 2.1.2), the Kyrgyz government in 2001 adopted a first *Comprehensive Development Framework for 2001-2010* (GovtKG 2002). The new program was mainly aimed at improving governance and tackling wealth disparities. The declared objective was to halve poverty levels by 2010 and to achieve sustainable economic growth on the basis of a market economy. The Akaev administration then tried to further decrease state interference in private sector activities and to eliminate administrative barriers to private entrepreneurship (UNPF 2004; UNDP 2005).

Persisting problems and political turmoil

However, nepotism and clientelism persisted, and eventually dragged people's trust in their government down to an all-time low. By 2005, public disappointment about the slow economic growth and the government's apparent inability to react became one of the main drivers behind the 'tulip revolution', which led to the ousting of President Akaev in March 2005. Unfortunately, however, things have not improved a lot since then. The new Bakiev administration has not been able to present a coherent development strategy, nor has it proved its ability or willingness to fight endemic corruption and nepotism. By the end of 2005, economic growth had slowed and people's real incomes had begun to shrink again. In late 2007, Kyrgyzstan came close to a humanitarian catastrophe, when in the course of the global food crisis, prices for basic food items suddenly doubled, and inflation once more spiraled out of control; independent experts estimated inflation rates of up to 36% (UN 2008; Omarov 2009). By 2008, Kyrgyzstan's basic development indicators presented a rather gloomy picture, even by CIS standards (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Basic development indicators for the Kyrgyz Republic, 2008 (UN 2008, 3)

	Kyrgyzstan	CIS Average*
Population	5.2 million (UNFPA 2007)	-
Under 5 mortality	4.1% (UNICEF 2006)	3.7%
Maternal mortality	150 per 100,000 (UNICEF, 2005)	29 per 100,000
Life expectancy	65.6 yrs. (HDR 2007)	67 yrs.
Gross national income per capita	US $590 (World Bank 2007)	US $2,699
Population living below national poverty line	39.9% (NSC, 2006)	n/a
2006 UNDP HDI score	0.696 (rank 116 of 177)	0.750

** Sources for CIS averages: HDR 2007; UNFPA SWP 2007; UNICEF www.childinfo.org; World Bank World Development Indicators*

The events of 2005 finally repeated themselves in early April 2010, when public disappointment about widespread nepotism, shady deals involving the president's family, the rising cost of electricity and mobile phone connections, obvious press censorship and the like culminated in the toppling of President Bakiev and the ruling government. According to Reeves (2010, no pagination) it was "poverty, in an absolute sense, as much as inequality that brought people out to demonstrate" (see also Steimann and Thieme 2010).

4.3 Agrarian reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic

Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian country to take major steps on the land question. In the face of a deepening national crisis in food procurement, the first legal reforms from spring 1991 (see 4.1.3) on private farming enterprises and land-use rights were soon amended and further developed.

4.3.1 Early distribution orders for unprofitable kolkhozes (1991-1994)

A November 1991 presidential decree[44] had already made the distribution of means of production compulsory for all collective and state farms producing less than 15% profit. The same decree also substantiated the rules for the first National Land Fund (NLF), created in April 1991, in which 50% of all arable land should be set aside for 'special distribution' (Bloch et al. 1996; Giovarelli 1998; Jones 2003; Ronsijn 2006).

The procedure for the distribution of arable land was formalized in 1992. Another presidential decree recommended that the unproductive collective and state farms divide their arable land into equal shares to satisfy every farm member's right to use a plot of land [45]. From 1992 onwards, responsibility for implementing these reforms at local level was passed to rural committees, which were formally controlled by the *rayon* administration (compare 4.2.2). They were made responsible for implementing national land reforms and for reorganizing collective or state farms locally, and apparently replaced the land commissions initiated by the first agrarian reforms of spring 1991 (compare 4.1.3). Through these committees, the *rayon* administration was also ordered to support local administrations with the measurement, division and distribution of land shares by providing experienced land-use planners [Russ.

[44] Presidential Decree No. VII-369, 10 November 1991.
[45] Presidential decree 'On measures for further implementation of land and agrarian reform in the Kyrgyz Republic', 10 December 1992.

sjemlestrojtel] (Bloch et al. 1996; Giovarelli 1998). In 1993, the first constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (adopted on May 5, 1993) defined that land could be given to citizens and legal entities for private use but would remain in state ownership (Giovarelli 1998, 11). However, the rural committees in charge of the distribution of land-use shares often consisted of former kolkhoz chairmen and other leading personnel from the socialist economy, who were often hostile to the central government's reform plans (Bloch 1996, 89f). The early agrarian reforms of the Akaev government thus met fierce resistance and did little to change local realities. In addition, many national parliamentarians also opposed the dissolution of collective and state farms, so that this first round of agrarian reforms remained largely ineffective (Pope 1994).

4.3.2 The heyday of privatization: the compulsory dissolution of kolkhozes (1994-1998)

By two years later, things had changed. By late 1993, most of the remaining collective and state farms were bankrupt. In the absence of state subsidies, agrarian production had more or less collapsed, and the kolkhozes were unable to pay and supply their workers and their families anymore. In view of the rapid impoverishment of the rural population, the Akaev administration had therefore to seriously push on with reforms and decided in 1994 to make de-collectivization compulsory for all collective and state farms. In the meantime, the once fierce local and regional resistance to the government's dissolution plans had also ceased, since it had become obvious that a formally state-led economy was economically unviable. A presidential decree[46] thus entitled all members and workers of kolkhozes and sovkhozes to a 49-year land-use share. The decree also reduced the share of the National Land Fund to 25% of all arable land, and stipulated that pastures must not be distributed but could be leased from the state, with priority being given to kolkhoz herders and farm employees (see 4.3.4) (Giovarelli 1998, 11; Bloch et al. 1996, 15).

Rules for the distribution of land shares

The distribution of land-use shares was defined in detail in Regulation No. 632, dated 22 August 1994. With the exception of pastures, non-arable land, planned building plots and all land reserved for the NLF, all arable land within a collective or state farm had to be divided into equal land-use shares and distributed free of charge to all current and former farm workers living on a given farm, including all their household members. In addition, retired or disabled people, any people born on a given farm who decided to return for permanent living, and all people living on a given farm but working in other spheres such as health, education, commerce, culture and farm supply were eligible for a land-use share. Thus, virtually all people living on a farm were entitled to a land-use share[47]. Certificates had to be issued by the rural committees to the respective head of household and had to be registered in the land cadastre of the *rayon* land management office (GosRegistr) to become legally enforceable (Bloch et al. 1996, 21).

To implement these reforms, the national government disempowered the often reform-averse local committees in January 1995 and adopted a regulation ordering the creation of more broadly representative 'committees for the implementation of land reforms and the reorganization of agricultural enterprises'. These new committees were no longer controlled by the rayon administration, and consisted of representatives from local up to national level (Giovarelli 1998, 17). In general, land-use shares were distributed in the same way on most collective and state farms. The size of shares depended on the farm's total arable land and the number of people entitled to a share. Consequently, people living in areas with more arable land (e.g. Chui and Issyk-Kul

[46] Presidential Decree No. 23, 22 February 1994

[47] Nevertheless, there are cases where people did not receive any land-use shares, since they were not officially registered with their kolkhoz when distribution began. See 7.3.2 for an example from Jergetal.

oblast) or with a low population density (e.g. Naryn) received larger land-use shares than people living in areas with less arable land and/or a higher population density (e.g. Osh and Jalal-Abad). Although land use shares were calculated per capita, the certificates were issued per household – a practice which continues to cause considerable confusion regarding individual land rights up to the present day. In November 1995, land-use rights were extended from 49 to 99 years, while a coherent federal Land Code, defining rules for mortgaging land and registering user rights, had still not been drawn up (Giovarelli 1998).

Rules for the division of livestock and non-divisible property

Large common property items such as public bath-houses, clubs or irrigation systems was not intended for distribution but passed into the ownership of the newly established *ayil okmotus* (see 4.2.2). Smaller non-land assets, however, were to be sold off or divided up among farm members. This included all livestock, fruit trees and fodder reserves as well as machinery and smaller buildings such as stables and barns. The exact rules and procedures for the division of these assets were usually defined by the local commission in charge. In the case of divisible property such as livestock, each kolkhoz member received a certain number of sheep, depending on the kolkhoz' total flock size. In addition, large animals such as cows, horses or yaks were divided according to household size. Due to the large number of animals in a kolkhoz and their division in many different flocks, the distribution of animals often took place in several steps and lasted for several months. As for the non-divisible property, barns and machines were usually allotted to local tribal leaders [Kyrg. *uruu bas'chy*], who were then responsible for negotiating the further division among their tribe. Barns and stables were often partitioned among all eligible households within a tribe, while many machines were sold or given to former mechanization specialists. However, as I shall show in chapter 7, much non-divisible property simply disappeared, either before or during the formal privatization process.

4.3.3 Passage of modern land laws (1998 onwards)

Once the distribution of land shares had been regulated and carried out in most former collective and state farms, the land-related political debates turned towards the land set aside in the Land Fund, as well as to the question of further specification of people's long-term property rights over land resources.

The Land Redistribution Fund (LRF)

In November 1995, the National Land Fund was renamed the Land Redistribution Fund (LRF) and placed under the authority of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Agriculture. However, political struggles about the Fund's designation and the rules for the allocation of its land reserves continued, reflecting an often contested land policy at the national level. Due to these struggles and delays, the legal adjustments of the LRF legislation often lagged behind the rapid changes at regional and local level. When clear and binding rules were finally issued, many communities had already distributed most of their arable land, often retaining less than the prescribed 25%, most of it barren and remote plots. This seriously affected the fund's subsequent attractiveness and usefulness[48] (Childress et al. 2003). Throughout the 1990s up to the early noughties, several observers therefore considered the LRF a significant source of tension (cf. Giovarelli 1998; Childress et al. 2003; Jones 2003).

In early 2000, responsibility over the LRF passed from the Ministry of Agriculture to the 454 communities, which had meanwhile replaced the former kolkhozes as official local political entities. Responsibility was transferred under the condition that LRF

[48] Personal communication, former land-use specialist with the Naryn *rayon* administration, 24 May 2007.

land was not to be sold into private ownership (Childress et al. 2003, 19). Since then, the LRF has been a land reserve fund at communal level. Communal authorities have the right to lease out LRF land to individuals and groups through a public auction process, to use it for the expansion of rural settlements or to give it to those in need free of charge. Chapter 9 discusses in detail the Fund's local significance and the respective practices of local actors.

Towards private land ownership

In October 1998, the Kyrgyz people voted in favor of private land ownership, and a constitutional amendment converted the former 49-year land-use rights into legal ownership documents. The Land Code 1999 secured these ownership rights, but still included a moratorium on land sales. Again, the moratorium was a consequence of fierce parliamentary debates about land privatization, caused by the fear that a few wealthy individuals, including Uzbek or Chinese investors, may accumulate large land plots (Jones 2003, 264; Spoor 2004, 29).

Another presidential decree marked the first step towards a gradual lifting of the moratorium. As of 1 September 2001, private purchase and sale of land became a reality, although several restrictions remained[49]. Amongst others, only Kyrgyz citizens who had lived in the respective rural area for at least two years were eligible to sell, purchase or inherit land. In addition, the maximum land holding per citizen was limited to 20 average land shares in a given *ayil okmotu*, or 50 ha in total. With these reforms, Kyrgyzstan became the only Central Asian Republic other than Kazakhstan to authorize private ownership of land (Eriksson 2006, 6).

4.3.4 Legal and organizational framework for pasture allocation and management

Unlike arable land, pastures have always been in state ownership in the Kyrgyz Republic[50]. However, coherent legislation on the allocation and management of pastures was missing throughout the 1990s. Various laws and regulations were partially relevant to pastures, but they were often inconsistent with each other, what led to misinterpretations.

Definition of three pasture categories and assignment to communities

The Land Code of 1999 was the first attempt to regulate pasture management nationally. The Code stipulated that all pastures shall remain the exclusive domain of the state and divided them into three legal categories according to their location and their distance from settlements. Each category was then put under a separate government authority (Table 4.2).

[49] Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On Management of Agricultural Land', 2001

[50] According to Art. 4-2 of the 1999 Land Code, the following types of land remain in exclusive state ownership: forests, water funds, special protected territories, frontier areas, LRF land, as well as all types of pastures.

Table 4.2 Different pasture categories, their designation and responsible authorities according to the Land Code 1999

Category	Designation	Responsible authority
Village-adjacent pastures [Russ. *prisel'nye pastbyshcha*; Kyrg. *ički jai'it*]	To be used as winter pastures	*Ayil okmotu*
Intensive pastures [Russ. *intensivnye pastbyshcha*; Kyrg. *ortonku jai'it*]	To be used as spring and autumn pastures	*Rayon* administration
Remote pastures [Russ. *otgonnye pastbyshcha*; Kyrg. *alysky jai'it*]	To be used as summer pastures	*Oblast* administration

During this process, every rural community was assigned certain areas of village-adjacent, intensive and remote pastures. In most cases, the new pasture boundaries were drawn on the basis of previous allocations to the former kolkhozes (Childress et al. 2003, 36). In addition, large sections of pasture land close to forested areas were placed under the authority of the State Agency for Environment and Forestry [Russ. *leskhoz*]. Last but not least, certain intensive and remote pastures were transferred to a special state land fund under the authority of the *rayon* administration, the so-called *GosSemSapaz* [Russ. 'state land reserve'].

Different reasons seem to have led to this division of authority over pastures. On the one hand, many politicians considered the recently established local self-government bodies incapable of taking on full responsibility for the often vast areas of pasture. On the other hand, pastures represent a key natural resource in many *oblasts*, so that the division between different levels of administration must also be seen as a political move[51]. However, somewhat similar to the problems around the Land Redistribution Fund (see 4.3.3), the lengthy process for drafting laws on pasture use and management left much room for arbitrary decisions. The fact that there was no legally binding legislation throughout the 1990s created many loopholes for semi-legal appropriation of pastures (Childress et al. 2003).

Introduction of a pasture lease system

Finally, in 2002, the Regulations 'On the Procedure for Providing Pastures for Lease and Use'[52] provided the necessary details regarding the allocation and management of the three pasture categories. The regulations defined the responsibilities and powers of the different levels of administration regarding pasture allocation, the principles and restrictions of pasture use, and the leasing procedure. According to these regulations, which were still valid at the time of my research for this thesis, pasture use is based on territorial leases, to be obtained by individuals or groups from the various levels of administration in a (mandatory) competitive bidding process. Pasture leases for grazing can be given for five years and can be extended by another 10 and again by a further 49 years (Undeland 2005, 51; Liechti and Biber-Klemm 2008). Due to the division of power between the three levels of administration, the legally defined rules and procedures for the use of pastures differ from village-adjacent pastures on the one hand to intensive and remote pastures on the other hand (see 10.3 and 10.4).

Yet while the reforms of arable land ownership and use had been more or less completed by the early noughties, the allocation and management of pastures has remained a subject of fierce debate up to the present day. Eventually, on 6 February 2009, the Kyrgyz parliament passed a new law entitled 'On pastures', which came into effect by a government resolution dated 24 June 2009 (see 10.5)[53].

[51] Personal communication with Anarbek Matysakov, former specialist at the agrarian department of the Kyrgyz Parliament, 15 September 2008.
[52] Govt. Resolution No. 360, June 4, 2002; amended September 27, 2004.
[53] Since I had already concluded my empirical field research when the new legislation became ratified, the evidence presented in this thesis does not focus on the new legislation. Nevertheless, section 9.5 reflects

4.3.5 Effects of the transition policy upon the agrarian sector

The dismantling of collective and state farms and the subsequent privatization of land and other assets resulted in a dramatic collapse of agricultural output. Between 1990 and 1996, the number of sheep and goats fell by 65% from 10 million to 3.7 million heads, mainly due to fodder shortage, disease and mass slaughter. At the same time, the number of cattle decreased by 33% from 1.2 million to 0.8 million head (Farrington 2005; Fitzherbert 2000, 13; Undeland 2005). Since then, flock numbers have increased again, but have not yet reached pre-independence levels (Figure 4.3)[54].

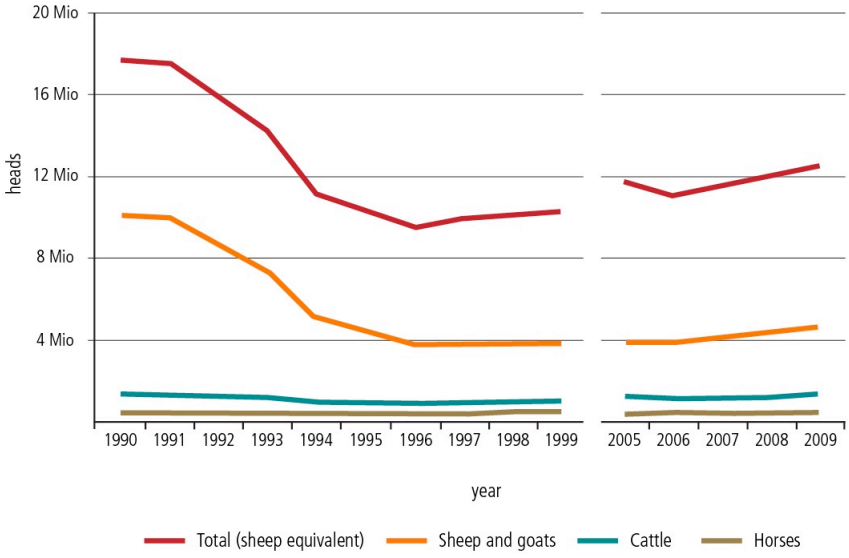


Figure 4.3 Livestock numbers in Kyrgyz–stan, 1990 to 2009 (Farrington 2005; NatStatKom 2009; no figures for 2000-2004 available)

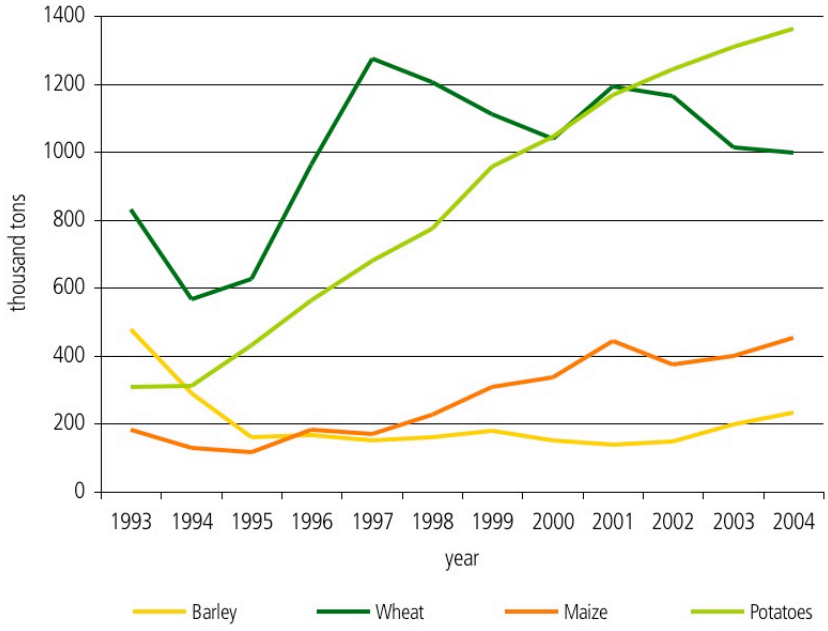


Figure 4.4 Yields of major crops in Kyrgyz-stan, 1993 to 2004 (Christensen and Pomfret 2007, 39)

Crop and fodder yields dropped to a similar extent after 1993, not only due to the partitioning of arable land, but also because of a lack of cash investment, fertilizers and working machinery. Thus, by 1994, most collective agrarian production had collapsed, and a large part of the rural population had to survive on their home gardens. This is

how various actors' perceived the new law at the time of research and describes their preventive strategies to cope with the announced changes.

[54] It shall be noted again that official statistics in Kyrgyzstan must be read with due reservation (see 3.2).

why potato production recovered earlier than production of most other crops. Wheat production recovered after 1995, but declined again after 1997 (Figure 4.4). In addition, the total area under crops has decreased since 2002, so that in 2007, only a quarter of all arable land was still in use for grain production (Mamytova and Mambetalieva 2008). Chapter 9 discusses the problems of land cultivation in more detail for the two case study villages.

4.4 Conclusions

Throughout the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan was among the fastest reformers in Central Asia. The Akaev government implemented many of the international donor community's suggestions and pushed ahead with a so-called 'shock therapy'. The therapy's prescription included rapid price liberalization, the introduction of a national currency, the decentralization of government structures and the state administration, and rapid privatization of former state property. After some initial difficulties and local resistance, the agrarian sector was soon subjected to a thorough privatization process, so that by the turn of the century, most former collective and state farms had disappeared.

External pressure versus internal continuities

International influence upon the Kyrgyz reform program was undoubtedly strong. From the very beginning, financial aid was often tied to conditionalities based on the neoliberal transition paradigm of the World Bank, the IMF and other international donor agencies. This was especially the case when in December 1998, Kyrgyzstan was the first CIS country to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). In order to comply with the organization's rules, the Kyrgyz government had to follow liberal trading policies and further eliminate tariff barriers. However, it would certainly be wrong to interpret Kyrgyzstan's agrarian sector reforms as a mere act of reproducing externally imposed, neo-liberal models. As I have shown in this chapter, the first agrarian reforms of the Akaev administration continued what *perestrojka* had begun in the late 1980s, namely to support private production and encourage local entrepreneurship. According to Abazov (1999, 209), the existence of "(…) a *bazaar* economy and abundant non-state enterprise, especially in the agricultural and service sector (…) helped to make Kyrgyzstan's people receptive to the process of privatization". In the early years of reforms, there was also considerable pressure in favor of a *restoration* of property rights instead of equal *distribution*, and there were considerable differences of opinion about who should be entitled to shares of land and livestock. Paradoxically, these controversies may also have exacerbated the gap between the political debates on the one hand, and early agrarian reforms and changes at local level on the other (Hann 2003; Spoor 2004).

Transition policy versus processes of transformation

Many of Kyrgyzstan's major reforms were initiated in the early years of independence. As a result, several often highly complex reform processes unfolded at the same time, triggering parallel processes of change in the political, economic and social spheres. The Kyrgyz example thus illustrates well what Offe (1994) has described as the 'dilemma of simultaneity' – parallel development processes which often develop asynchronously and were thus hardly ever harmonious. This chapter's short review of Kyrgyzstan's reform path and its many adjustments and corrective measures has shown that politico-administrative and agrarian reforms often overlapped and sometimes obstructed each other. For instance, the national government soon decided to strengthen representation at local level by establishing rural committees (see 4.2.2). However, when it turned out that these committees, which often consisted of former kolkhoz elites, were one of the main obstacles to rapid implementation of national

privatization policies, they were abolished again. In many cases, however, these and other reform adjustments came rather late so that local realities often changed faster than national legislation. The Land Redistribution Fund (LRF; see 4.3.3) is another excellent example of such disparities between national *transition* policy and local processes of *transformation*. When the national parliament finally agreed on a legislation prescribing that every *ayil okmotu* shall retain 25% of all arable land in a local LRF, most communities had already distributed much more than that. Thus, local processes not only often outpaced national transition policies, but sometimes also took a different direction from that envisaged by reformers and advisors at national level.

By and large, these disparities and the resulting deviations from the prescribed reform path created many loopholes. In the agrarian sector, ineffective reforms before 1994, numerous legal adjustments and the apparent lack of control by higher administrative levels gave rural elites considerable 'room for maneuver'. This eventually led to many violations both before and during the distribution of land and other assets, as well as in the appropriation of pastures. Although rapid, the Kyrgyz reforms were thus anything but transparent, fostering nepotism and corruption and a political system characterized by patronage and clientelism rather than public accountability. Karakulova and Mamytova (2008) thus conclude that "the effect was not to create a vibrant, diverse private sector, but simply (…) a new kind of monopoly where key assets passed into the hands of a few privileged regime insiders". Parts B and C of this study analyze these processes and the role of local actors in the two case study villages both now and over the course of the abolishment of former kolkhoz structures.

Part B
Persistence and emergence of socioeconomic disparities

5 Current livelihood disparities in the two case study villages

Animal husbandry and pasture used to and indeed still do play a highly significant role in the livelihoods of the local population of Naryn *oblast*. The *oblast* not only has the most livestock and pastures in Kyrgyzstan, it is also home to some of the largest alpine summer pastures in Central Asia, including *Ak-Say*, *Arpa* and *Son-Koel* (see Map 5.1). However, as a remote rural area and a former outpost of the Soviet Union, the *oblast* was hit particularly hard by the collapse of the socialist economy. After 1991, rural poverty increased rapidly, as did the importance of subsistence-oriented livelihood strategies.

Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu, the two villages selected for this study, reflect the recent development in the area very well. The two former kolkhozes[55] have long struggled with the severe economic crisis after 1991 and recovered only slowly after 1996. Today, people in both villages face difficulties to access markets and paid jobs outside the still weak agrarian sector, so land cultivation and animal husbandry are still crucial to securing their subsistence needs. Despite these similarities, however, the two villages differ in various other aspects, especially regarding people's access to arable land and pastures as well as in terms of the local institutional context. Last but not least, their transformation from a kolkhoz into an 'ordinary' rural community has followed different trajectories.

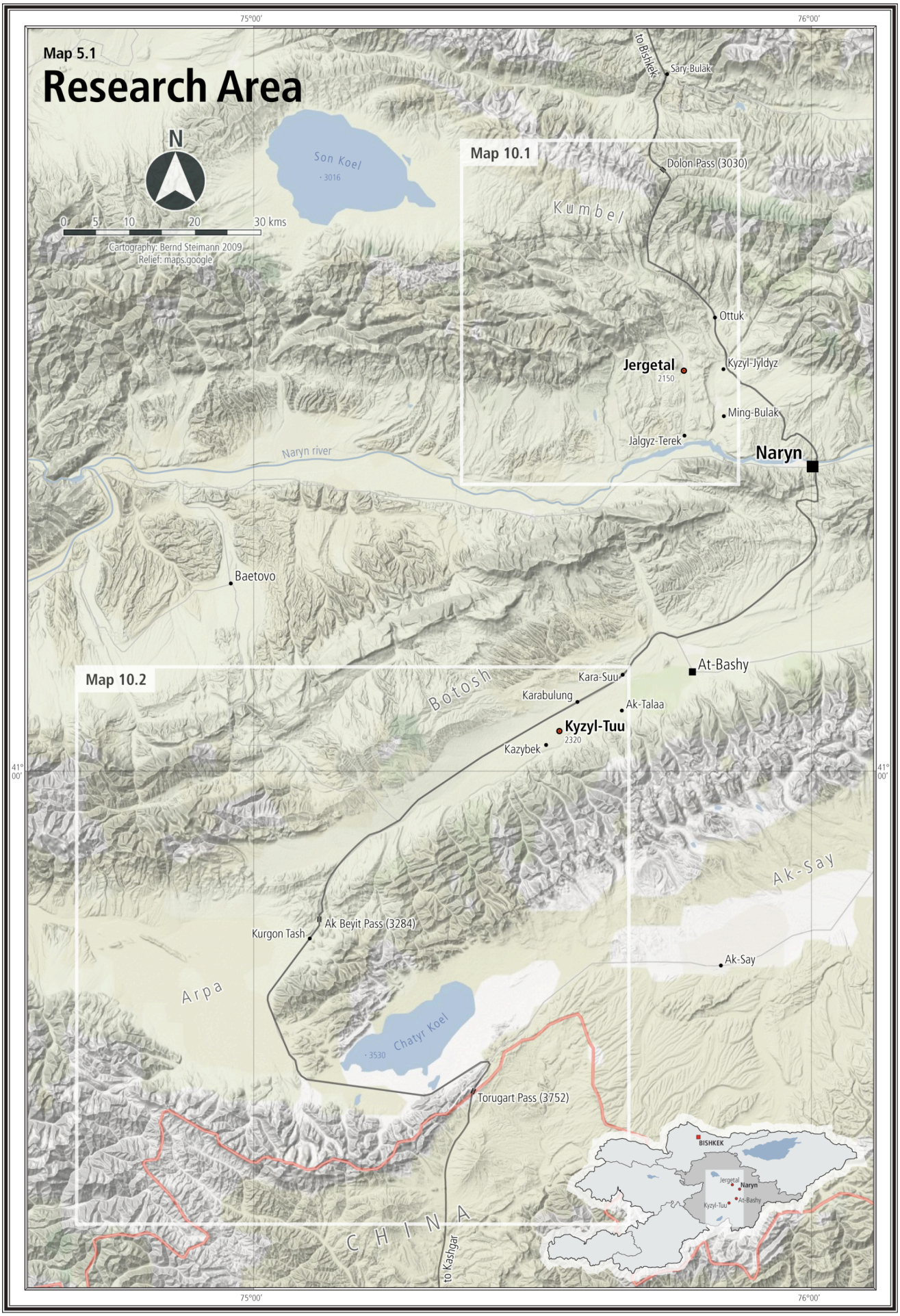
This chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.1 gives a brief introduction to Naryn *oblast* and portrays the two case study villages in terms of their history, their endowment with arable land and pastures, and their administrative and economic structure. Section 5.2 builds on the results of the household survey carried out in 2007 for a quantitative description and comparison of livelihoods at the village and the household level, with a particular focus on land use, animal husbandry and various cash income sources. In order to get a better grasp of the socioeconomic disparities observed at household level, section 5.3 develops a household typology. This typology is used to select and describe five household groups in section 5.4. These household groups will then be used for further qualitative analysis in the subsequent chapters.

5.1 A brief introduction to Naryn oblast and the two case study villages

5.1.1 Naryn oblast

Naryn *oblast* is the largest and most mountainous province in the Kyrgyz Republic. It is located between 1,500 m and 6,000 m amsl, and more than 70% of its territory is mountainous. The valleys are characterized by a semiarid steppe climate with warm summers, cold and long winters and an average precipitation of 200 to 300 mm/year. This result in short annual growth periods of 60 to 120 days and a high dependence on irrigated farming. The natural vegetation is characterized by sub-alpine and alpine grasslands, alluvial forest along the main streams at lower altitude, and some coniferous forest in narrow valleys and gorges (Wilson 1997; GovtNaryn 2009; www.globalbioclimatics.com; accessed 12 Jan 2010).

[55] See 6.1 for a detailed description of the functioning of collective farms [Russ. *kolkhoz*].


Map 5.1
Research Area
N
0 5 10 20 30 kms
Cartography: Bernd Steimann 2009
Relief: maps.google
75°00′
76°00′
41° 00′
to Bishkek
Sary-Bulak
Son Koel
· 3016
Map 10.1
Dolon Pass (3030)
Kumbel
Ottuk
Jergetal
2150
Kyzyl-Jyldyz
Ming-Bulak
Jalgyz-Terek
Naryn river
Naryn
Baetovo
Map 10.2
Kara-Suu
At-Bashy
Botosh
Karabulung
Ak-Talaa
Kyzyl-Tuu
2320
Kazybek
Ak-Say
Kurgon Tash
Ak Beyit Pass (3284)
Arpa
Chatyr Koel
· 3530
Torugart Pass (3752)
CHINA
to Kashgar
BISHKEK
Jergetal
Naryn
Kyzyl-Tuu
At-Bashy

The *oblast* is very sparsely populated; its population is predominantly rural. Naryn is the capital and the only town in the *oblast*, which is organized in five *rayons* (districts). At-Bashy *rayon* covers the largest area and has the lowest population density; Naryn *rayon* is second largest, but with a considerably higher population density, since it also includes Naryn town (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 General statistics for Naryn oblast, Naryn rayon and At-Bashy rayon, 2006 (GosRegistr At-Bashy and Naryn 2007; NarynStatKom 2007)

	Naryn Oblast	Naryn Rayon	At-Bashy Rayon
Total area [km^2]	45,200	7,800	19,000
Arable land [km^2] [a]	1,325	n/a	n/a
Pastures [km^2] [b]	26,263	6,547	6,973
Population	268,672	43,400	49,500
Average population density [people/km^2]	5.9	5.6	2.6

[a] arable land and hay meadows; [b] including all types of pastures

Bordering China in the south, the *oblast* is crossed by a major trade route connecting China and Kazakhstan. However, in the absence of any large markets and trading hubs, the provincial economy is dominated by agriculture, which accounts for 63.3% of GDP, compared to only 7% from industry and 24% from services (UNDP 2005b). The agricultural sector is dominated by livestock production. 95% of all agricultural land is classified as pasture land, while only 3% is registered as arable land, including 0.4% hay meadows (Table 5.1). Wheat, barley and sainfoin are the dominant crops, while a considerable amount of the plowed land is only used for haymaking, often due to the absence of a functioning irrigation system. Potatoes and vegetables are mainly grown in home gardens. The livestock sector is dominated by sheep and goats, cattle and horses, and poultry. Unlike in the socialist economy, sheep are now predominantly fat-tailed breeds with colored coarse wool and suited to meat production. Official figures report a considerable increase in the number of sheep and goats, while the number of horses and cattle has remained fairly stable (Figure 5.1)[56].

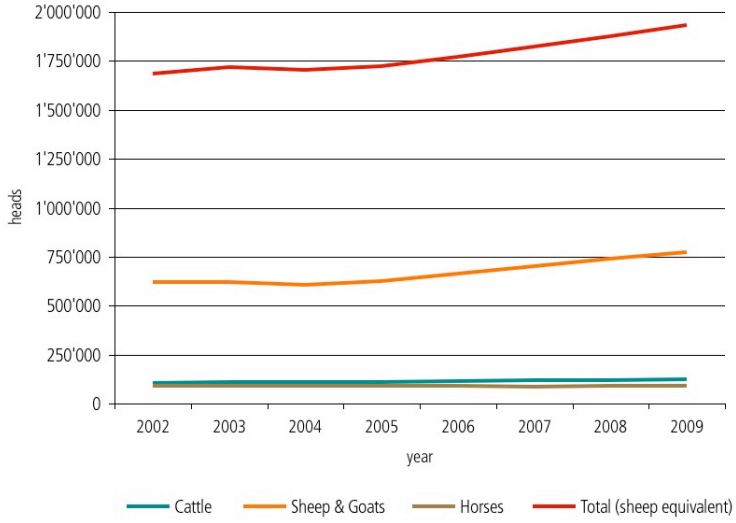


Figure 5.1 Livestock in Naryn oblast, 2002 to 2009 (NarynStat-Kom 2007, 2008; NatStatKom 2009)

A poor transport infrastructure and the *oblast's* general remoteness hinder producers' access to national and international markets. Other than a large number of small local and regional food and livestock markets, the At-Bashy livestock bazaar is the only market with any wider significance, since it is also visited by Kazakh and Chinese traders. Common development indicators reflect the *oblast's* slow economic

[56] On the reliability of official statistics, see 3.2.

development. In 2004, 66% of the provincial population lived below the official poverty line, of which 31% lived in extreme poverty[57]. The *oblast's* HDI was 0.701 in 2003, compared to a national HDI of 0.729 (UNDP 2005b). In late 2008, the UN reported that more than 30% of the provincial population suffered from severe food insecurity (UN Flash Appeal 2008).

5.1.2 Jergetal village

Jergetal village [Kyrg. *ayil*] is the main village in the Jergetal community [Kyrg. *ayil okmotu*], which is part of Naryn *rayon*. Two other smaller villages – Jalgyk Terek and Kyzyl Jyldyz – also form part of Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, but have not been included in this study. The village is located about 25 km from Naryn town at an elevation of 2,150 m amsl, and stretches over a distance of three kilometres on both sides of a river of the same name (see Map 5.1). Survey results from May 2007 count 2,421 inhabitants living in 404 households (including 211 absent migrants)[58]. This results in an average household size of 6 people (without absent migrants: 5.5). The households belong to different *uruu* [Kyrg. 'tribe'; see box 5a below], of which the largest ones – *Mongoldor, Jetigen, Checheï* – comprise 35 to 50 households.

Jergetal *village* has 675 ha of arable land, most of it irrigated. About 65% of it is used to grow grass, forage and fodder legumes, while about 30% is used to cultivate wheat and barley. Vegetables and potatoes are mainly grown in home gardens (Jergetal Baseline Study 2008, 10)[59]. Jergetal *ayil okmotu* has been allotted a total of 91,597 ha of pastures, of which 18,140 ha are categorized as village-adjacent, 24,179 ha intermediate, and 49,278 ha remote pastures[60] (communal statistics, 2007).

Local government and non-governmental organizations

Jergetal *ayil okmotu* was established in the mid-1990s within the boundaries of the former kolkhoz Jangy Talap (see 6.1.2). The formal decision to dissolve the kolkhoz was taken in early 1994 when the Kyrgyz government started to exert increased pressure on collective farms to carry on with privatization. Thus, between winter 1993/4 and summer 1994, animals, arable land, barns and machinery were distributed to all the households in the kolkhoz[61]. At the same time, the kolkhoz was formally transformed into an *ayil okmotu*.

Today Jergetal village is home to the municipal administration, where the head of the rural executive committee [Kyrg. *ayil okmotu*] and his staff have their offices[62]. The *ayil okmotu* staff includes a chief accountant, a land-planning specialist responsible for leasing out communal arable land and managing the village-adjacent pastures, a statistician and a social development specialist responsible for calculating and allocating pensions and child allowances. The municipality building also houses a meeting hall for the local council [Kyrg. *ayil kengesh*] and the *Aksakal* council. Since 1992, Jergetal village has had its own *Aksakal* council with the authority to resolve minor conflicts at communal level through an *Aksakal* court. Council and court, which became legally formalized in the village in 1995, have different chairmen.

[57] In April 2009, the official poverty line was defined as a monthly income of 963 KGS (US$ 23) (Zentralasienanalysen 16/2009, 27).
[58] The 2007 community statistics count 2,980 inhabitants, including 73 migrants. The difference in the number of inhabitants can be explained by the fact that several houses were abandoned at the time of research.
[59] A direct comparison between the two villages regarding the area of arable land and pastures is not possible because official statistics refer to different levels, i.e. either village or community level.
[60] See 4.3.4 for the formal classification of pastures in Kyrgyzstan.
[61] Chapter 7 provides a detailed analysis of the privatization process.
[62] Most people use the term *ayil omkotu* indiscriminately to describe the political entity (community), the municipal administration, the administration's building, as well as the head of the rural executive committee.

Since July 2003, Jergetal village has had its own Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance (TPS). The TPS engages in social and economic communal development and interacts with external NGOs and aid agencies to implement local development projects and allocate micro-credit to local entrepreneurs. With the support of the World Bank-funded Community Development and Investment Agency (ARIS), a local Water Users' Association (WUA) was established in 2003. Its objective is to jointly organize the irrigation of all arable land and to modernize and maintain the local irrigation infrastructure. The same idea stands behind the local Pasture Users' Association (PUA), which was established in April 2007 with the support of the Swiss-funded Central Asian Mountain Programme (CAMP). Unlike the WUA, the PUA was not yet legally formalized at the end of 2008 (The role of WUAs is discussed in chapter 9; the Jergetal PUA is discussed in chapter 10.) In addition, there are a remarkable number of private associations: in 2007, Ibraimova (2009, 60) counted about 20 local self-help groups, micro-credit groups and neighborhood cooperatives, as well as 11 – often short-lived – village development organizations.

Private service sector and access to agricultural markets

A few, often short-lived small retail shops offer little more than vodka, cigarettes and ice cream. A few families sell mobile phone units on commission. Some people with their own car work irregularly as taxi drivers to Naryn and Bishkek. Those who own a tractor, truck or combine rent out their services to others during the harvesting season. There are also a few small, privately operated flour mills. Besides a veterinarian who is partly employed by the *ayil okmotu*, there are two privately operating veterinarians.

There are two weekly livestock markets. *Örnök bazaar*, halfway on the road to Naryn, specializes in sheep and goats. *Kyrk Bozüi*, on the main road to Bishkek, is specialized in cattle and horses and is only open in summer. A little bit further, the daily *bazaar* in Naryn town is the largest agricultural market in the region. In addition, traveling traders visit people in the village or on the pastures directly to buy livestock, milk products, wool and skins at cheap prices. People who spend the summer on the alpine summer pastures often sell their milk products to traveling traders or to the salesmen at the *Kyrk Bozüi* trading post – or to the new mining company.

The 'Spektor' gold mine: a new player boosting the local economy

In 2006, a Chinese-owned mining company started to operate an open-cast mine called *Spektor* on Jergetal's intensive pastures[63]. One year later, the Russian management began employing local people as miners, offering them 15-day shifts and daily wages of 700 to 1,000 KGS (US $16-23), an exceptionally good salary for local and even regional circumstances. By summer 2008, around 70 people from the village had taken jobs at the mine, some of them herders who live close to the mine in summer. At the same time, an increasing number of herding households that spend summer close to the mine began to sell their produce – mainly milk, butter and yogurt – to the mining company. This not only allowed them to reduce transport costs; the mine also offered prices up to 25% above what the traders at *Kyrk Bozüi* pay. The appearance of the mining company has fundamentally altered the local economy, not only by creating new livelihood opportunities for the local population, but also by causing new conflict lines to appear at local level. Chapter 10 discusses this case in detail.

[63] See 4.3.4 for the definition of formal pasture categories.

Box 5a Household, family, kin, tribe, kolkhoz, brigade

Social identity and affiliation in post-socialist rural Kyrgyzstan are often constituted by different, overlapping frames of reference at various levels. The first frame of reference is kinship. The basic entity is *üi-bülöö* which stands for the nuclear family. This usually includes a married couple, their children and, depending on the situation, the husband's parents living in the same household. *Kuda* denotes the parents-in-law of a married couple, *kudachylyk* describes the relationship between the parents-in-law, and in-laws are usually addressed as *kudagyilar*. *Kuda* is also used to describe customary life cycle feasts within the extended family.

The second frame of reference is the tribal structure, which is also closely, yet not exclusively, related to kinship. According to Curtis (1996, no pagination), tribal identity "remains an important element of social status". The lowest level in the tribal social structure is the so-called *uruk* ['seed'], an exogamic unit that includes close patrilineal relatives over seven generations. One or several *uruk* form an *uruu* ['tribe'], i.e. a network based on extensive kinship relations, which is headed by an *uruu bas'chy* ['head of the tribe']. The *uruu* is the largest grouping within a segmentary lineage system sharing a common genealogy. By contrast, tribal confederations, which consist of several *uruus*, are political units that need not have a common genealogy. Some of the largest Kyrgyz tribal confederations are the *Bugu*, *Sary Bagysh*, *Solto*, *Adigine*, or *Saruu* (Geiss 2003, 32ff). Each tribal confederation belongs to one of two 'wings', either *sol* [left] or *on* [right] wing. A third wing, *ichkilik*, contains a number of tribes from the South (Kreutzmann 1995; Curtis 1996).

However, there is considerable confusion about the boundaries and subdivisions of tribes, tribal confederations and wings. This is true of both the Kyrgyz people who often mix up or use the two terms *uruu* and *uruk* [64] indiscriminately, and also of existing literature on the subject. Not only is 'tribe' defined in many different ways, but there is also an inconsistent usage of the terms *uruu* and *uruk* on the one hand, and of 'tribe' and 'clan' on the other[65]. Additionally, different authors link certain tribes and tribal confederations to different wings. However, as Geiss (2003) points out, this confusion also indicates that the concept of tribe does not relate to kinship alone (i.e. exogamic units), but has also been socially constructed through historical forms of social organization such as military units or communities at peace.

A third frame of reference is constituted by residence. On the one hand, every Kyrgyz community [Kyrg. *ayil okmotu*] is divided into one or several *ayils* ['villages'], each of which is headed by an *ayil bas'chy* ['village head'; see also 4.2.2]. However, today the concept of *ayil* is less important than in pre-colonial times, when it denoted a group of several nomadic camps. On the other hand, elder people still refer to socialist concepts of residence, when every rural resident belonged to a particular collective [Russ. *kolkhoz*] or state farm [Russ. *sovkhoz*] , and was attached to one of its sub-units [Russ. *brigada*].

5.1.3 Kyzyl-Tuu village

Kyzyl-Tuu (which, translated literally from the Kyrgyz, means 'red flag') is one of two villages of the Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, which belongs to At-Bashy *rayon*. Karabulung, the second village, has not been included in this study. It is located at an elevation of 2,320 m amsl, about 38 km from the *rayon* centre At-Bashy and 100 km from Naryn town (see Map 5.1). Survey results of May 2007 account for 1,431 inhabitants living in 256 households (including 144 absent migrants). This results in an average household size of 5.6 people (5.0 without absent migrants). Most households belong to the tribe [Kyrg. *uruu*] of *Asyk*, while a small minority belongs to the *uruu* of *Jeryk*. In Kyzyl-Tuu, *Asyk* is further divided into 11 sub-tribal groups [Kyrg. *uruk*][66].

[64] Personal communication with Kalkan Kerimaliev, local historian, Kyzyl-Tuu, 16 Aug 2008; with Amantur Japarov, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, 17 Sept 2008; and with Rustam Tashtanov, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, 21 Jan 2010.

[65] For instance, what Hvoslef (1995), Geiss (2003) or Gullette (2006) call a 'tribe' is a 'clan' in the words of Collins (2006). For the sake of clarity, I translate *uruu* as tribe in this thesis, the more so as the expression 'tribalism' has become a commonly used term among the Kyrgyz themselves (Gullette 2006, 22).

[66] Namely *Aity Kara, Baikojo Baimyrza, Balbak, Beshkörük, Biirike, Böörübay, Esengeldy, Kemel, Kenjesh, Seyit, and Toi* (Personal communication with the social inspector of the Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, 30 Jul 2008).

Karakojun *ayil okmotu* disposes of 2,328 ha of arable land, most of which is used either to grow fodder crops or as hay meadows. An additional 906 ha (356 ha irrigated; 99 ha rainfed; 451 hay meadows) are in the community's Land Redistribution Fund (LRF). The *ayil okmotu* disposes of 70,635 ha of pastures, of which 16,809 ha are categorized as village-near, 17,854 ha as intermediate, and 35,972 ha as remote pastures (communal statistics, 2007).

Local government and non-governmental organizations

Karakojun *ayil okmotu* was established in June 1996 within the boundaries of the former Karakojun kolkhoz (see 6.1.2). In 1991, the kolkhoz was formally transformed into a so-called 'cooperative'. About 70% of all local households joined, while the rest claimed their private shares of land, livestock, barns and machinery. After three years of deepening economic recession and absent state support, the cooperative collapsed, and the remaining land, livestock, barns and machinery were distributed among all the households in early 1994 (see chapter 7). At the same time, the kolkhoz was formally transformed into an *ayil okmotu*.

Today Kyzyl-Tuu village is home to the municipal administration of the Karakojun *ayil okmotu*. As in Jergetal, there is an *ayil kengesh* and an *Aksakal* council and court. The latter was established in 1991 and formalized in 1995. Council and court have the same nine members, but different chairmen[67]. Unlike Jergetal, Kyzyl-Tuu has no Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance (TPS), and there are few private associations. In 2002, ARIS initiated a Water Users' Association (WUA) for Kyzyl-Tuu and the neighboring Kasybek *ayil okmotu* to build a joint pump system for drinking water and to manage the irrigation of arable land (see chapter 9). In 2006, Kyzyl-Tuu took part in an initiative by the *oblast* administration to foster small cooperatives in the areas of land cultivation, livestock breeding and social development. While they received small grants from the *oblast* administration, the technical assistance initially promised never materialized, and at the time of research, these cooperatives had virtually ceased to exist (Personal communication with a former cooperative member, 15 August 2008).

Private service sector and access to agricultural markets

The private service sector in Kyzyl-Tuu consists of little more than a few small retail shops, a couple of taxi drivers and those offering their services as tractor and combine harvester drivers. One family has established a small restaurant/shop on the main road to China. In addition, there are four privately operated flour mills. The nearest agricultural market is the weekly livestock bazaar in the *rayon* centre At-Bashy, where there is also a large commodity market. From time to time, mobile traders roam the village in order to buy wool and skins at cheap prices. Many families spending summer on the alpine summer pastures sell milk products on a weekly basis to traveling traders or along the main road to China. Besides a veterinarian who is partly employed by the *ayil okmotu*, there are also two veterinarians in private practice.

[67] Personal communication with the head of the Kyzyl-Tuu *Aksakal* court, 25 November 2007.

5.2 Land, livestock and cash incomes

5.2.1 Arable land

Under Soviet rule, every rural household was entitled to a small piece of land to cultivate potatoes and vegetables. While the kolkhoz management concentrated on growing fodder crops, these home gardens [Russ. *ogorod*] were essential to the survival of the rural population. In the course of the privatization campaign of the mid-1990s, all arable land has been equally distributed among all residents of the former kolkhoz. The size of the land plots distributed depended upon the kolkhoz' total area of arable land. Thus, people in Kyzyl-Tuu received larger shares (0.80 ha/capita) than the residents of Jergetal, where land resources are rather limited (0.27 ha/capita).

Considerable disparities regarding land ownership also exist at household level. In the course of the privatization process, every individual in a former kolkhoz received an equal share of arable land, so that larger households were allotted more land than small ones. A ten-person household in Kyzyl-Tuu thus received eight hectares of land, while a two-person household got only 1.6 ha. In addition, land shares differ regarding the availability of irrigation, distance from the village and other factors. The survey results also indicate that some sort of redistribution of land has taken place since the initial distribution in the mid-1990s, since the current per-capita land shares per household are anything but equal (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Per-capita ownership of arable land by household (own survey 2007)

Owned land per capita [ha]	**Jergetal [n=387]** % of HHs	**Kyzyl-Tuu [n=236]** % of HHs
none	1.3	0.8
0.01 – 0.25 ha	55.0	10.2
0.26 – 0.50 ha	33.3	23.3
0.51 – 0.75 ha	7.5	29.7
0.76 – 1.0 ha	1.6	15.7
> 1.0 ha	1.3	18.8
	Average = 0.28 ha	*Average = 0.79 ha*

One important reason for these disparities regarding per-capita land is the demographic changes that have taken place at the household level since 1994. Besides births and deaths among household members, this also includes the splitting of households through inheritance. Another reason is that many asset-poor households who cannot afford to cultivate all the land they received often do not consider remote fallow land as their own anymore (see section 11.1). Nevertheless, land sales are still very rare[68]. Households without any arable land are generally those who moved to the village after 1995. They are only entitled to own land for construction, not for agriculture. They can, however, lease land from others or from the municipal Land Redistribution Fund (LRF). However, only a few households lease in agricultural land from neighbors, kin or from the LRF, and if they do, they usually only lease small plots (Table 5.3)[69].

[68] Transactions of private land shares were not allowed until 2000, when the nation-wide moratorium on land sales was gradually lifted (compare 4.3.3).
[69] Practices around land cultivation and land transfers are discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Table 5.3 Rented land per household (own survey 2007)

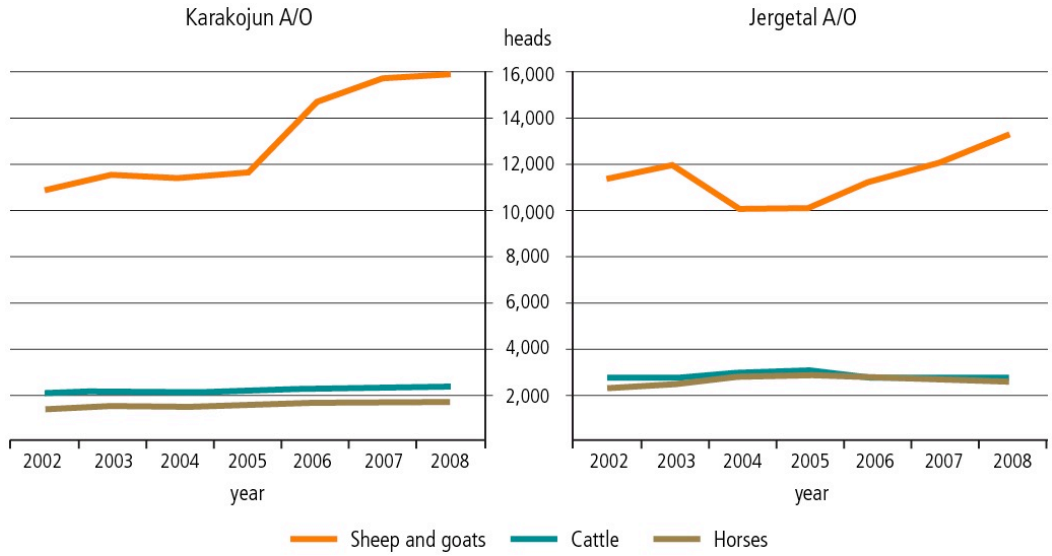
Rented land per HH [ha]	**Jergetal [n=395]** % of HHs	**Kyzyl-Tuu [n=252]** % of HHs
none	93.2	87.7
0.01 – 2 ha	3.9	3.2
2.01 – 5 ha	1.9	7.2
> 5 ha	1.1	2.0

5.2.2 Livestock

"There is no life without livestock in this village." This statement, repeatedly voiced by many respondents, is a very good illustration of the importance people ascribe to animals' role in their own livelihoods. Animals, especially sheep and horses, were at the core of the Kyrgyz nomadic lifestyle in pre-colonial times. In Soviet times too, sheep, cows and horses were not just kept for the sake of the kolkhoz, but also for people's private needs. Then like today, animals not only served self-sufficiency purposes, but were also an important means of establishing and maintaining social ties among kin and neighbors, e.g. through gifts and the celebration of life-cycle feasts. In addition, livestock is important financial capital which can be converted into cash whenever need arises. Thus, only few households in both villages make a living without livestock – mostly against their will (compare 10.1).

In late 1993 and early 1994, animals were distributed to all kolkhoz residents. Apart from a few households in Kyzyl-Tuu who claimed their private shares in 1991 or 1992 already, most people in a village received the same amount of animals, although the type and condition of animals varied considerably. Most households then mixed these animals in with the ones they had already kept privately during Soviet times. However, the dissolution of the kolkhozes, by increasing rural poverty and problems with livestock diseases, led to a rapid, countrywide collapse of livestock numbers that lasted until 1996. Since then, the trend has generally been upwards (Figure 5.2), and many farmers are actively engaged in livestock marketing at local, regional and sometimes even national level. Unlike the land market, livestock markets were not restricted by the state after 1991[70].

Figure 5.2 Livestock numbers 2002 to 2008 [in heads] (own graphic; NarynStatKom 2007, 2008)



[70] Chapter 7 discusses the collapse of the kolkhoz flocks in the early 1990s; Chapter 9 analyses people's practices around animal husbandry and the use of pastures.

Today, the total amount of livestock is nearly the same in the two villages, while the average number of livestock units [LU] per capita[71] is higher in Kyzyl-Tuu (Table 5.4). An average household in Kyzyl-Tuu owns 16.7 LU, but in Jergetal this is only 11.2 LU.[72]

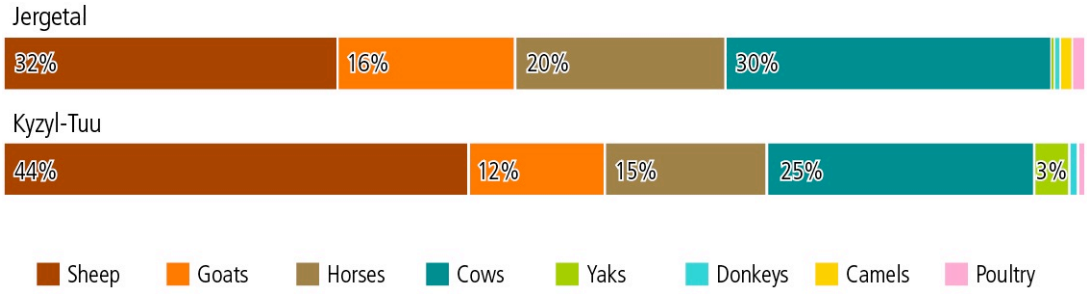
Table 5.4 Flock size per household (own survey 2007)

Livestock Units [LU]	**Jergetal [n=397]** % of HHs	**Kyzyl-Tuu [n=254]** % of HHs
no livestock	9.6	7.9
0.1 – 1.0 LU	6.8	5.1
1.1 – 10.0 LU	54.9	41.0
10.1 – 20.0 LU	14.4	24.4
20.1 – 70.0 LU	11.8	18.5
> 70.0 LU	2.5	3.1
	Average per HH = 11.2 LU *Average per capita = 1.83 LU*	*Average per HH = 16.7 LU* *Average per capita = 2.96 LU*

However, remarkable disparities in flock sizes also exist at household level. About two-thirds of all households own between 1 and 20 LU, while some households have no animals at all and others own more than 70 LU, which is more than 350 sheep or seventy cows. The share of those with more than 20 livestock units is larger in Kyzyl-Tuu (22%) than in Jergetal (14%).

As for the type of animals, an average household's flock consists of around 80% sheep and/or goats, 5- 10% of each horses and cows, plus some poultry; wealthier households tend to keep more horses and cows than sheep. Nevertheless, sheep and goats are the predominant animal in both villages and account for 48% of all livestock units in Jergetal, and 56% in Kyzyl-Tuu. Since the early 1990s, indigenous fat-tailed sheep types, which produce a preferred quality of mutton, have widely replaced the fine-fleeced type preferred in socialist times (Fitzherbert 2000)[73]. Cows account for 25 to 30% of all livestock units; horses for 15 to 20 %. Other animals – donkeys, yaks, camels and poultry – make up the rest (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3 Share of animals by livestock units [in %] (own survey)



[71] 1 livestock unit [LU] is equal to 5 sheep/goats, 1 cow or 0.8 horses.

[72] When the household listing was carried out in May 2007, the offspring season was already over, so that both adult and young animals were counted. This may at least partly explain the variation observed in the official data for the village level, collected by the local state administration every 1st January (Official statistics 2007 for Jergetal Ayil, received from the communal statistician, April 18, 2007). Another factor is that people tend to understate their real number of livestock during official surveys, as this largely determines a household's entitlement to child allowances. In Jergetal, where livestock figures for the village level are available, the listing accounts for a total of 4,430.2 livestock units, which is 34% above the official statistics for 2007 (2,935 livestock units). In Kyzyl-Tuu, official figures exist for the *ayil okmotu* level only.

[73] Kyrgyz herders hardly ever distinguish between sheep and goats when counting their animals, and many consider goats the 'sheep of poor people' because goat meat is less appreciated by locals (cf. Jacquesson 2003).

5.2.3 Cash income sources

In the kolkhoz system, most rural households made a living from a combination of kolkhoz wages, premiums, and their own production from the home garden and their private flock. However, with the collapse of the socialist economy, central allocation schemes for jobs and wage labor ceased to exist, leaving the majority of the population unemployed. At the same time, subsidies for agrarian production and commodity prices dried up, so that many people faced increasing problems to make a living. Many then tried to make a living from the land and the livestock they received in the course of the privatization process, yet – as the subsequent chapters will show in more detail – not all succeeded to an equal extent. Sooner or later, many therefore sought to diversify their sources of cash income, exploring different income opportunities in the farm and non-farm sectors. Table 5.5 shows that social support, animal husbandry and regular salaried jobs are the three main sources of household cash incomes in the two case study villages today.

Table 5.5 Main cash income-generating activity of households [in %]

Main cash income source	**Jergetal [n=401]** % of HHs	**Kyzyl-Tuu [n=255]** % of HHs
Social support	**41.8**	27.1
- Old-age pension	*25.4*	*15.7*
- Child allowances	*16.2*	*11.4*
- Support by others	*0.2*	-
Animal husbandry (meat, dairy)	27.6	**38.8**
Regular salaried job	12.2	12.5
Trade or other business	5.7	5.5
Farming / Agriculture	5.0	5.5
Herding for others	3.2	4.7
Non-farm labor	2.5	3.1
Agricultural labor	0.5	0.4
Remittances	0.5	2.0
Other	0.7	0.4

Social support: old-age pensions and child allowances

Social support is the most important source of cash income in Jergetal, where 42% of all households depend primarily on either old-age, disability and other pensions, child allowances or support by others (i.e. relatives, neighbors or friends). 27% of all households depend primarily on social support in Kyzyl-Tuu too.

Old-age, disability and survivors' pensions are paid to all former employees and members of collective or state farms at the age of 63 after at least 25 years of covered employment (men) or at the age of 58 with at least 20 years of covered employment (women). Old-age pensions consist of a basic element (530 KGS, but not less than 12% of the final year's average wage) and an insurance element based on the number of years of covered employment and earnings (SSA 2009, 127f). In the two case study villages, monthly pensions vary between 670 and 2,000 KGS (US $16-48). This is hardly ever enough to make a living. Invalids, war and labor veterans and so-called 'hero mothers of the Soviet Union' receive supplementary pension payments and get reductions on public transport, although this is of little practical use in the countryside. Deaf and blind people receive between 530 and 770 KGS (US $13-19) per month, as well as a 50% discount on electricity and coal.

Child allowances [Russ. *posobie*] are determined on a yearly basis by the municipal social development specialist. Box 5b explains how the allowances are determined according to a household's cash income. Since so many households depend on child allowances for their livelihoods, the fact that both livestock and arable land are part of the calculation seems highly interesting. On the one hand, the consideration of sheep

and goats may explain why many people are reluctant to talk about how much livestock they own. On the other hand, the fact that arable land is taken into account may persuade some households to disclaim ownership over land they cannot cultivate (compare 9.2.4).

Box 5b Child allowances

Every communal administration has to keep a 'social passport' for every single household. The passport not only contains a list of a household's property, but also of its officially calculated income. A household is entitled to child allowances if its monthly per capita income does not exceed the guaranteed minimum standard of living (GM). In 2007, the GM was set at 175 KGS/month, and the per capita income was determined as follows:

- Per hectare of arable land (without home garden): 55.90 KGS/month
- Per *sotik* [0.01 ha] of home garden: 3.5 KGS/month
- If the household owns more than ten sheep: 2.5 KGS/month (e.g. 11 sheep = 27.5 KGS)
- If the household own more than one cow: 81.5 KGS/month
- In addition, cash incomes from regular salaried jobs, own enterprises and pensions

Livestock other than sheep and cows are not taken into account. Per capita incomes are assessed on an annual basis. If people refuse to disclose their assets and incomes, the communal specialist for social development estimates an approximate value. Example: a household of five with 2.5 ha of land, 0.4 ha home garden, eight sheep, two cows and a monthly old-age pension of 1,000 KGS would have an official income of 288.55 KGS/month, and would thus not be entitled to child allowances.

The amount of allowances per child depends on the child's age and the household income. For every newborn child, a household receives a single birth grant of 525 KGS. After that, there is a monthly lump sum of 262.50 KGS up to the age of 18 months. From 18 months to 16 years (18 years if a full-time student), the allowances depend on household income. Unlike old-age pensions, which are co-funded by employees, self-employed people, employers and the state, child allowances are fully paid by the Kyrgyz state, i.e. the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Communal administrations are in charge of disbursement (SSA 2009, 131; Personal communication with the Senior Specialist for Social Development, Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, 17 May 2007).

Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry is the most important cash income source in Kyzyl-Tuu, where 39% of all households depend primarily on the sale of live animals, meat and dairy products, as well as wool and skins. In Jergetal, 28% of all households primarily depend on this source of cash income. Thus, animal husbandry not only serves rural people's subsistence needs; it is also an important means of generating cash. If secondary cash income sources (not tabulated in Table 5.5) are taken into consideration as well, even 43% of households in Jergetal and 65% in Kyzyl-Tuu depend on animal husbandry as a cash income source. This also means that farming – i.e. the cultivation of fodder crops – is of considerable importance for cash income, although its direct significance is very limited (see below). Cultivating fodder crops and hay is absolutely crucial to maintaining animal husbandry, since many people cannot afford to buy enough additional fodder to keep the animals stall-fed throughout winter.

Regular salaried jobs

After the collapse of the socialist state economy with its central job allocation schemes, regular salaried jobs and wage labor have become scarce in rural areas. In both villages, 12% of households depend primarily on a regular salaried job, mainly in the public sector, i.e. teachers, doctors, clerks, secretaries, cleaners or electricians at local or *rayon* level. Salaries in the public sector are usually very low: teachers in local

schools earn between 2,000 to 5,500 KGS/month (US $53 to 133), depending on seniority, while accountants or secretaries at the *ayil okmotu* earn between 1,600 and 2,800 KGS/month (US $39 to 68). Thus, an average household can hardly ever survive on a single regular salaried job in the public sector, but alternatives in the private sector are very rare.

Other cash income sources

Trade and other business accounts for only 5.5% each. This includes the self-employed such as owners of small shops, traders, taxi drivers and operators of trucks, tractor and other agricultural machinery. A few women are engaged in sewing or produce handicrafts. Apart from its contribution to animal husbandry (through the cultivation of fodder crops), **farming** is of very limited significance to household cash incomes. This reflects not only the difficult environmental conditions in Naryn *oblast* (high altitude, little precipitation), but also the land user's dependency on a functioning irrigation system if they want to cultivate something else than fodder and hay. The few households able to make an income from farming usually do so by selling hay, sainfoin and barley, as well as wheat and potatoes. While the market for fodder is predominantly local (among neighbors), a few people can sell wheat and potatoes on regional markets or to traders. Home gardens are usually used to cultivate potatoes and vegetables for subsistence needs. Local opportunities for paid **(non-)agricultural and (non-)farm labour** are very limited. While some comparably wealthy families can afford to hire paid workers for labor-intensive tasks, the less wealthy support each other through *ashar*, a traditional practice of (unpaid) mutual help among kin and neighbors (see 9.3.3). **Herding**, however, seems to have become an increasingly attractive job. Livestock numbers have increased in recent years and so has the number of households taking care of other people's animals in return for payment in cash or kind. Most of these 'herding households' work from early May to late September, while a few do so the whole year round. Chapter 10 examines the role of herding households in detail. Very few respondents only mentioned **remittances** by labor migrants as the main source of their household's cash income. This may indicate that many migrants leave for educational rather than for labor reasons, or that they do not remit much money. Another reason may be that many households receive remittances on an irregular basis, thus not considering them 'real' income.

Lack of secondary cash incomes

The analysis of secondary cash income sources (<50% of the household's total cash income; not shown in Table XX) by and large reflects the income patterns discussed above – with the important exception that 20% of all households in Jergetal and 9% in Kyzyl-Tuu have no secondary cash income at all. Most of these households have their own animals, selling a few from time to time despite not perceiving this to be a cash income. Nevertheless, there are a few households in both villages without either a secondary cash income or livestock; they depend on social support as their main and sole source of cash income.

The comparison of arable land, livestock and cash income sources reveals considerable disparities at village level. On average, people in Kyzyl-Tuu own more livestock and dispose of more arable land than people in Jergetal. This may explain why the importance of animal husbandry in generating cash income is higher in Kyzyl-Tuu, while there is a staggering dependence upon social support in Jergetal. But also at household level, the analysis of livestock numbers – a common wealth indicator in these parts – reveals significant socio-economic disparities. While some households do not have a single animal, others have more than 100 sheep and 20 cows. Likewise, the analysis of cash income sources reveals large differences in a household's ability to generate cash income. All in all, such disparities call for an accurate distinction of the subject, i.e. the household.

5.3 Household typology

In order to take into account the socioeconomic disparities observed at household level in further analysis, I have grouped households along two main axes that are particularly relevant to my research questions: the importance of pasture resources to the household's cash income, and the number of livestock a household owns (see 3.2 for a critical discussion of typologies).

Pastoral cash income sources [x-axis, 4 categories]

Out of the various cash income sources at village and household level examined in section 5.2, I consider the following to be specifically related to pastoral activity: sale of live animals, meat, dairy products, wool and skins, and herding other people's animals in return for payment. Other potential income-generating activities related to pastures, such as tourism or the collection and sale of herbs, were not observed. The typology distinguishes between main and secondary cash income source.

Livestock units [y-axis, 5 categories]

Section 5.2 describes the distribution of livestock at village and household level, and discusses the potential bias regarding the number of livestock. To be able to compare different livestock holdings, I have converted all animals into livestock units (LU). Since ducks, hens and turkeys are usually kept in the yard and have but a negligible impact upon pastures, I omit them from further analysis. The typology distinguishes five layers of livestock holdings. The range of 0.1 to 1 LU helps to identify those households with no more than one milking cow, while the threshold of 70 livestock units is a result of the statistical spread in the empirical data.

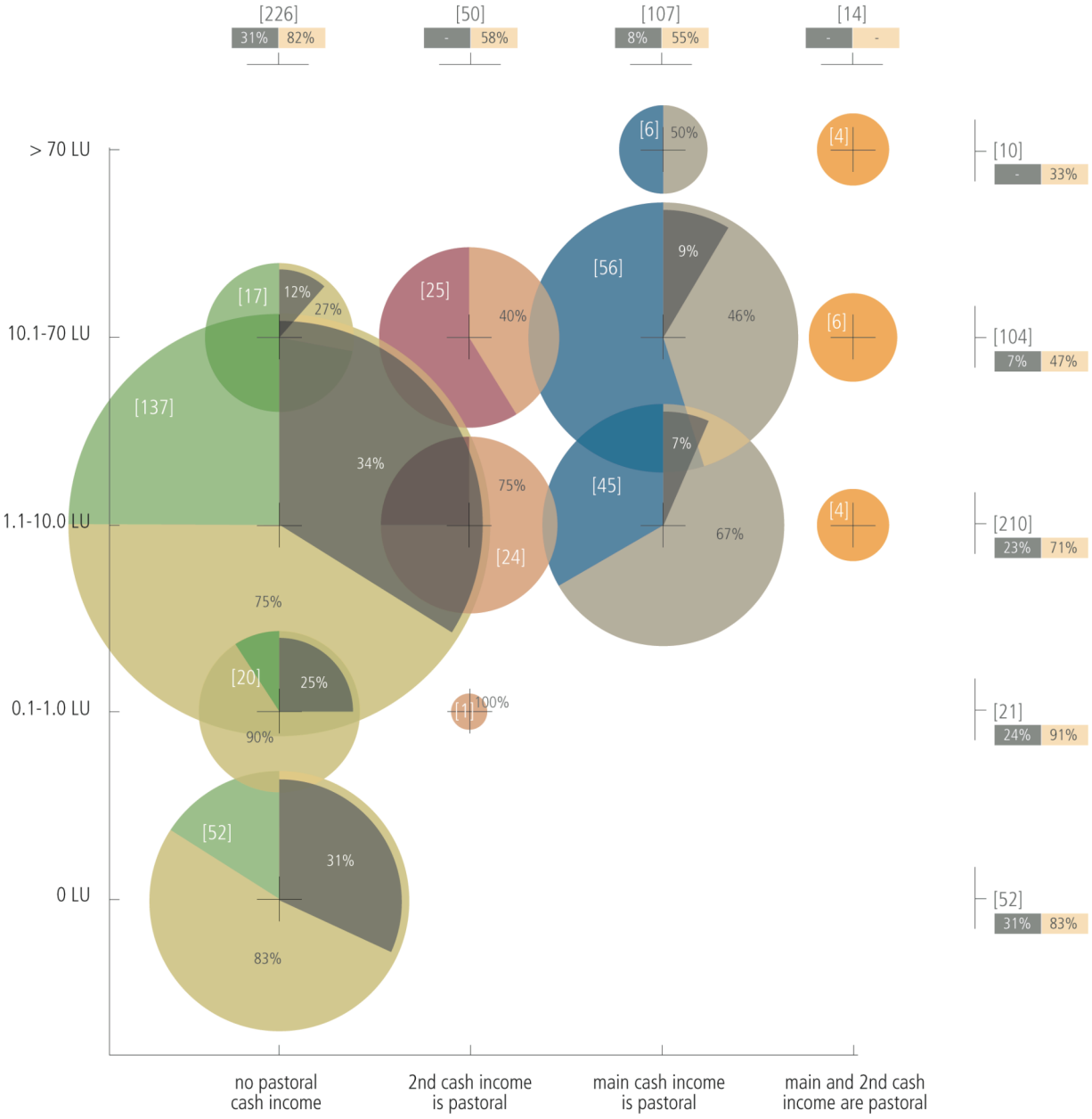
Eventually, the combination of the two dimensions livestock units and income sources results in 20 potential household groups. Figures 5.4 to 5.7 visualize the resulting household groups for the two villages.

Figures 5.4 and 5.5 Household groups, Jergetal village (own survey 2007)

All in all, there are 13 different household groups in Jergetal village. The largest group contains 137 households, or 35% of all households in Jergetal: these households own a small flock (1.1 to 10.0 LU) but have no pastoral cash income. The second largest group consists of 56 households, or 14% of all households in Jergetal: they own a considerable number of animals (10.1 to 70.0 LU), and their main cash income comes from the use of pastures. The third largest group consists of 52 households (13%): these households have neither livestock nor pastoral cash income.

Figure 5.4 shows the considerable socioeconomic disparities at household level in Jergetal. On the one hand, there are large differences in the number of animals per household: while there are a few wealthy households with very large flocks (above 70 LU), even more households have no animals at all. Similarly, only a few households are able to generate both their main and their secondary cash income from pastoral activities (yellow), while more than half of all households can or do not generate such income (green). Overall, there is a predominance of smallholders with a flock size of between 1.1 and 10 livestock units.

Figure 5.4 Jergetal village, household groups [n=397]. Social support and no secondary cash income source (own data, 2007)



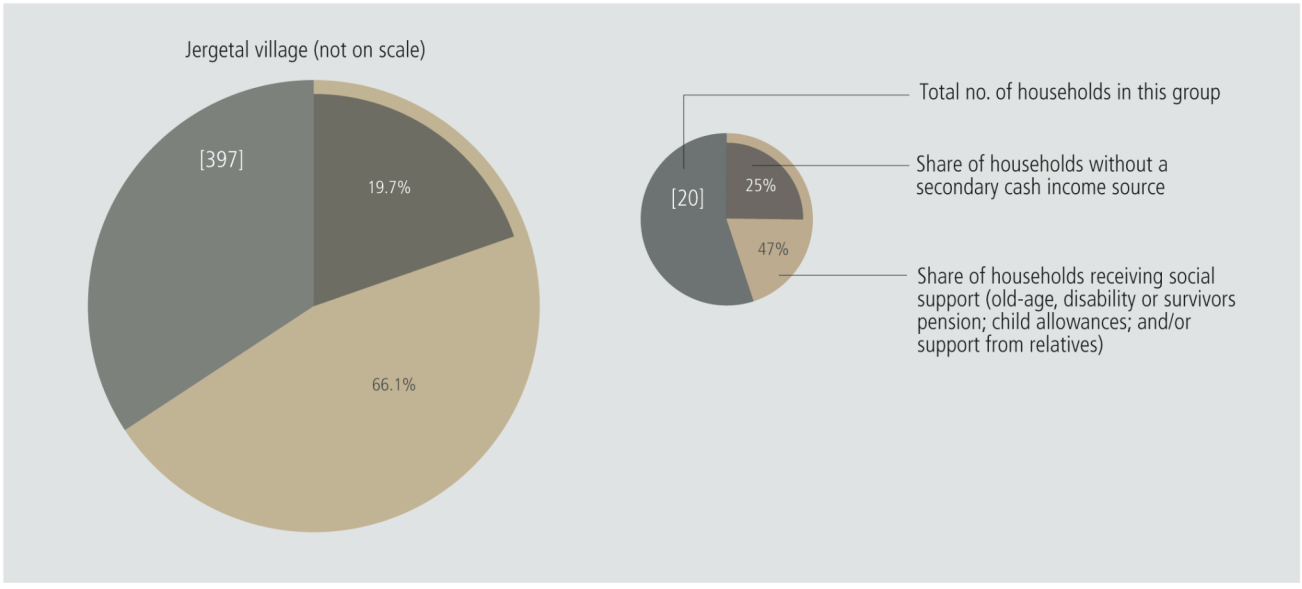
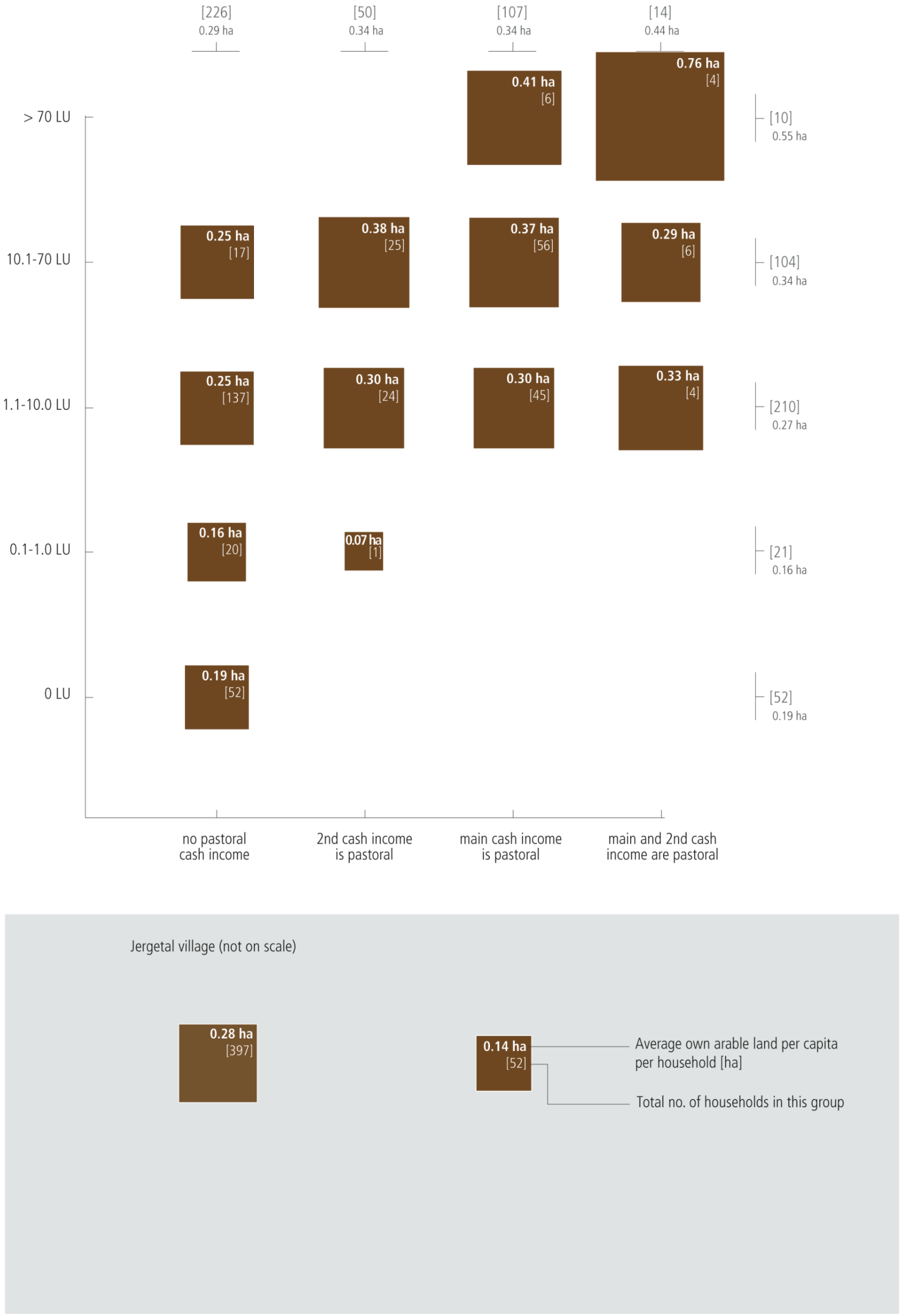


Figure 5.5 Jergetal village, household groups [n=397]. Own arable land per capita (own data, 2007)



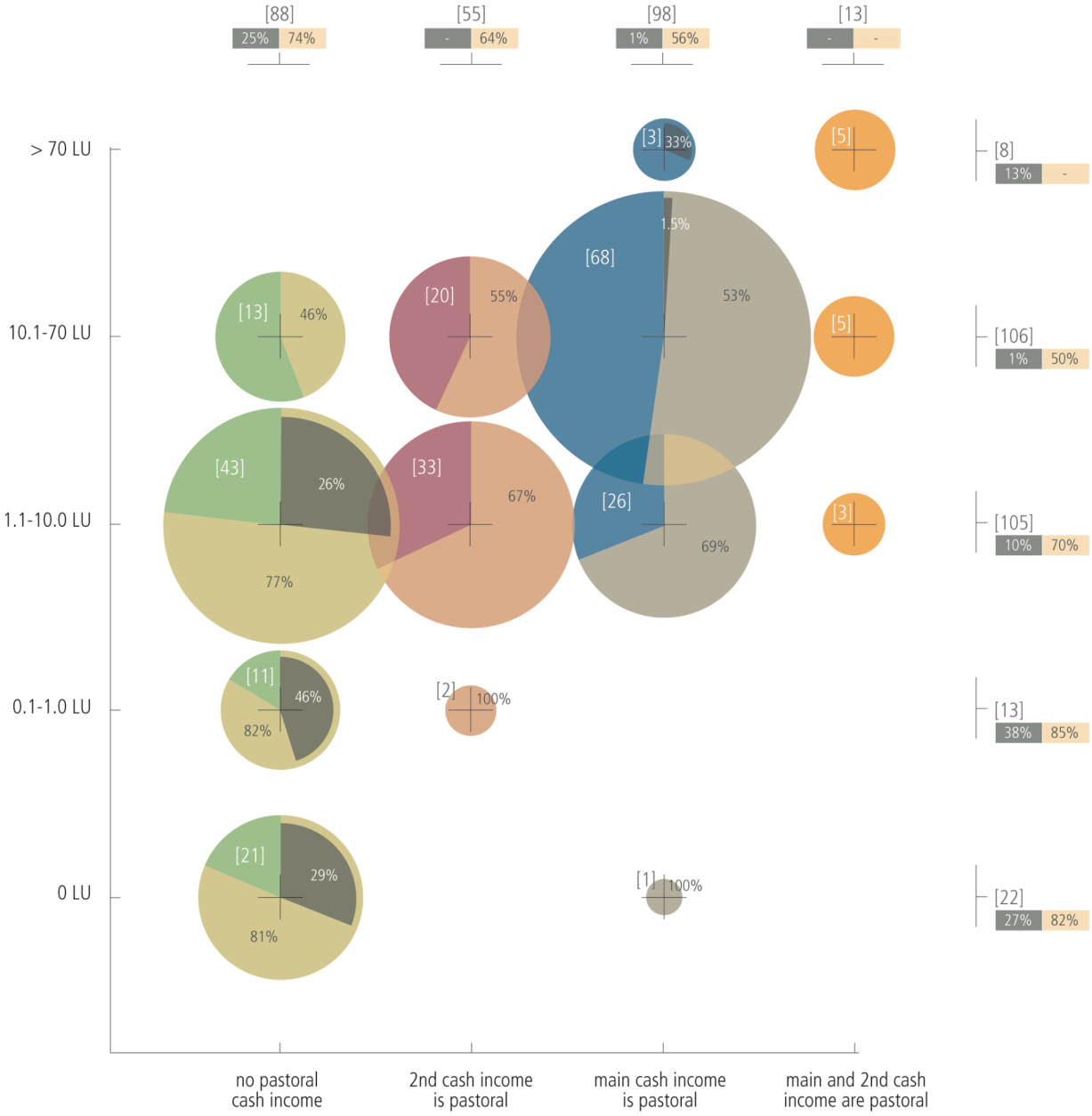
Additional indicators from the household survey – lack of a secondary cash income source or dependence on social support – help to crosscheck to what extent the number of livestock reflects wealth disparities. Figure 5.4 shows that households with little livestock are more likely have no secondary cash income source than others. Similarly, the proportion who depend on child allowances or on help from relatives, neighbors and friends is much higher among households with little livestock than among those with an average or above-average flock size. By contrast, the proportion of households depending on old-age pensions is higher among those with an average or above-average flock size. This indicates that there are many young households among the less wealthy. Last but not least, there are considerable disparities between the household groups in regard to their private arable land per capita (Figure 5.5). Obviously, households with a lot of livestock own considerably more arable land than households with few or no animals. Chapter 9 analyzes these disparities in detail.

Figures 5.6 and 5.7 Household groups, Kyzyl-Tuu village (own survey 2007)

14 household groups can be distinguished in Kyzyl-Tuu. The largest group consists of 68 households, or 27% of all local households: they own between 10.1 and 70.0 LU and generate their main cash income with a pastoral activity. The second largest group contains 43 households (17%): just as in Jergetal, these households have a small flock (1.1 to 10.0 LU) but no pastoral cash income. Households in the third largest group (33 households; 13%) have the same amount of livestock, but derive their secondary cash income from pastoral activity.

Figure 5.6 shows the considerable disparities among households in Kyzyl-Tuu. As in the case of Jergetal, a small minority of eight households own very large flocks (above 70 LU), while a much larger group (52 households) have no animals at all. Again, only a few households are able to generate both their main and secondary cash incomes from pastoral activities (yellow). Unlike in Jergetal, however, the group of households with a main pastoral cash income (blue) is larger than the group of households with no such income (green). In general, there are more households with a mid-sized flock than in Jergetal, indicating that pastoral income-generating activities are more important in Kyzyl-Tuu than in Jergetal. Again, additional indicators can help to crosscheck the supposed correlation between a household's flock size and its wealth. Figure 5.6 shows that, as in Jergetal, the proportion of households with no secondary cash income source is highest among those with little or no livestock. Similarly, households with less livestock are more likely to depend on child allowances and the help by others, while dependence on old-age pensions is higher among those with more livestock, indicating that there are more young households among the less wealthy. As for households' private arable land per capita (Figure 5.7), the disparities are not as pronounced as in Jergetal; nevertheless, wealthy households have considerably more arable land per capita than their less wealthy neighbors. Thus, the typology doesn't only reflect households' different flock sizes and their ability to generate pastoral cash incomes, but also wealth disparities among the different household groups. The figures strongly suggest a clear livestock-wealth nexus – and seem to confirm an often-heard statement in the two case study villages, namely that 'those who managed to keep hold of their animals since privatization are rich now'.

Figure 5.6 Kyzyl-Tuu village, household groups [n=254]. Social support and no secondary cash income source (own data, 2007)



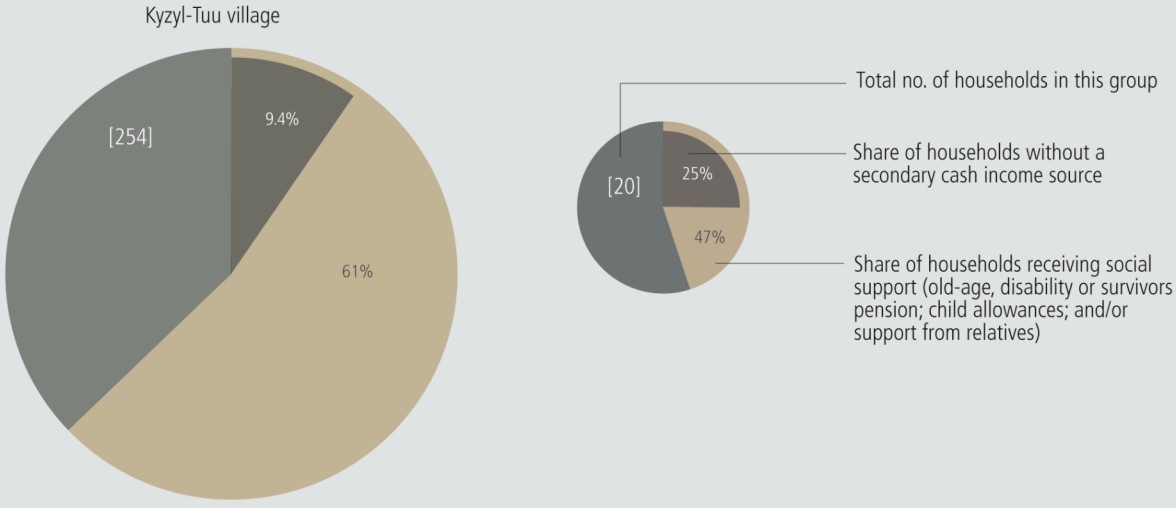
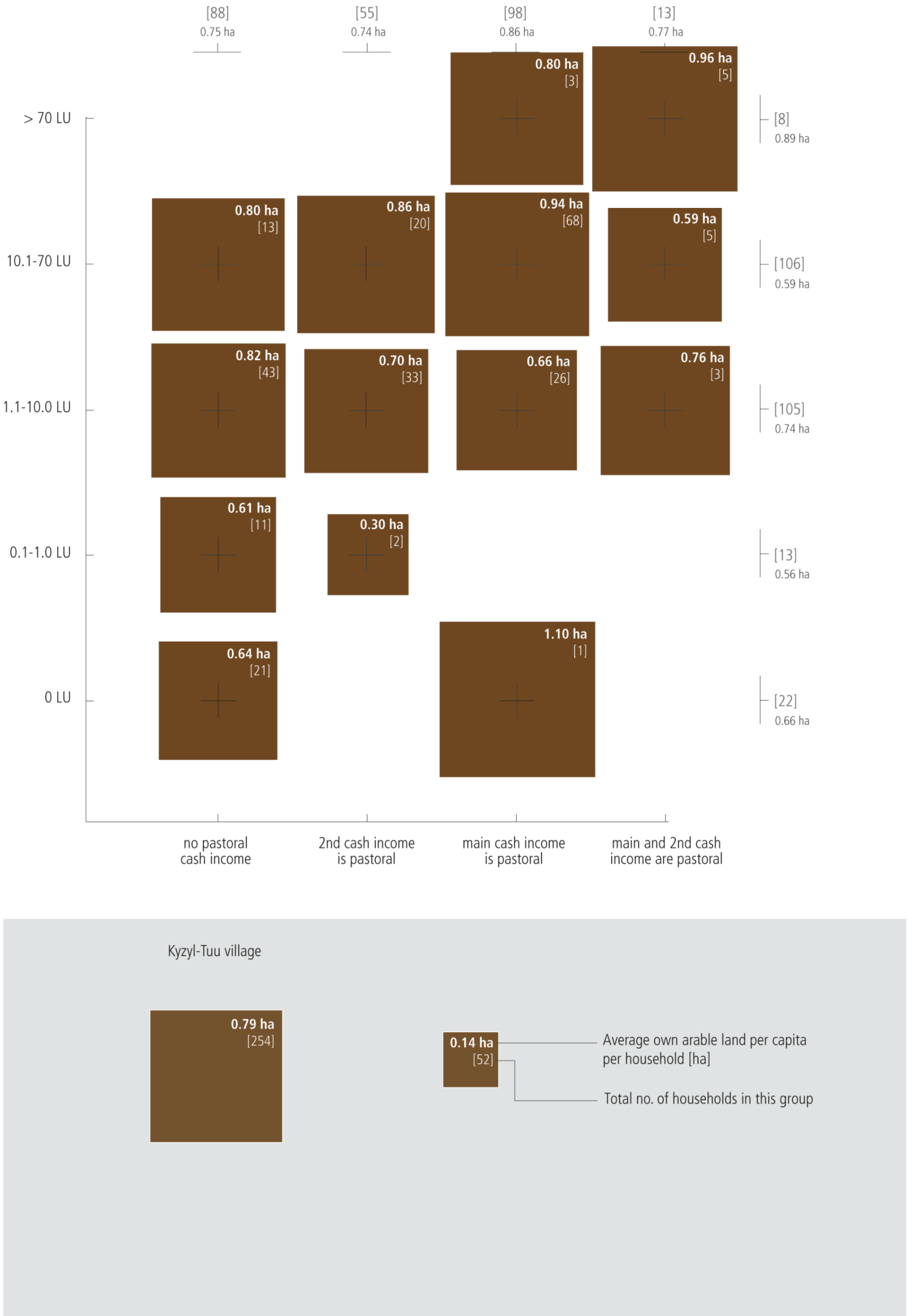


Figure 5.7 Kyzyl-Tuu village, household groups [n=254]. Own arable land per capita (own data, 2007)



5.4 Selected household groups

Table 5.6 lists the five groups – no livestock, smallholders, mid-sized farms, large farms, and herders – selected for further analysis, their main characteristics as well as the number of households sampled randomly within each group (see chapter 3 for the methodological considerations behind a stratified random sampling.). The sample size represents the actual number of households analyzed in each group. For most groups, the initial sample was larger. However, when I felt I had reached theoretical saturation within a group, I stopped visiting the remaining sample households. The subsequent sections provide a short general description of each group and explain why they were selected for further qualitative analysis.

Table 5.6 Selected household groups, group characteristics and sample size (own survey)

	Households [n]	Households [%]	Livestock [LU] (Average LU)	Average arable land per capita [ha]	Cash income sources	Average HH size[a]	Sample Size [n]
Jergetal							
'No livestock'	52	13	0 (0)	0.19	No pastoral cash income source	5.3	4
'Smallholders'	137	35	1.1-10.0 (4.1)	0.25	No pastoral cash income source	5.9	8
'Mid-sized farms'	56	14	10.1-70.0 (24.9)	0.37	Main cash income source is pastoral	6.5	9
'Large farms'	10	3	>70.0 (103.3)	0.51	One or two pastoral cash income sources	9.1	3
'Herding households'	16	4	variable (10.2)	0.33	One cash income source is herding	5.7	4
Jergetal Total	397	100	variable (11.0)	0.28	Variable	6.0	28
Kyzyl-Tuu							
'No livestock'	21	8	0 (0)	0.64	No pastoral cash income source	5.3	3
'Smallholders'	43	17	1.1-10.0 (4.5)	0.82	No pastoral cash income source	5.4	7
'Mid-sized farms'	68	27	10.1-70.0 (23.1)	0.94	Main cash income source is pastoral	5.9	6
'Large farms'	8	3	>70.0 (147.9)	0.89	One or two pastoral cash income sources	6.4	2
'Herding households'	13	5	Variable (12.9)	0.71	One cash income source is herding	5.7	3
Kyzyl-Tuu Total	254	100	Variable (16.5)	0.79	Variable	5.6	21

[a] *including absent migrants*

5.4.1 Households without own livestock and no pastoral cash income ('no livestock')

Despite a commonly accepted and repeatedly expressed opinion that 'there is no life without livestock in the village', there are a considerable number of households without their own livestock in both villages. Most of these people were already living in the village at the time of privatization, and thus received their shares of land and

livestock. Obviously, they have lost or sold all their animals since then, and have not been in a position or willing to invest in livestock again. Others moved to the village after 1994 and have thus not participated in the distribution of assets. Last but not least, some households consist of young, recently married couples who have just left their parents' home to establish their own family.

Households in this group have only a small amount of arable land compared to the respective local average (68% in Jergetal, and 81% in Kyzyl-Tuu). Some households have no arable land at all even. Nevertheless, only one household in this group leases additional arable land. In spite of the apparent land shortage, this group has the largest proportion of households that derive a cash income from farming. They use their comparably small land holdings to grow wheat, hay and fodder crops. While wheat is mostly cultivated for subsistence needs, every fourth household in this group earns cash from selling potatoes (usually grown in the home garden), hay and/or fodder. The latter is usually sold to neighbors that have their own animals but cannot produce enough fodder on their own.

More than 80% of all households without livestock depend on external support, either in the form of financial support from relatives, neighbors and friends, or in the form of old-age pensions, child and other state allowances. In Jergetal, income from seasonal labor is more common than from regular salaried jobs, while every third household in Kyzyl-Tuu draws upon a regular salaried job (e.g. teachers, librarians, electricians). Nevertheless, 30% of all households in this group have no secondary cash income, far above the respective local average. The same is true of the proportion of households that depend solely on a pension or child allowances. All of this suggests that households without their own livestock are among the least wealthy in the two villages. As they have no livestock to sell, they often cannot generate cash when the need arises.

Box 5c Household biography of a household without livestock

"I was born in 1979 and grew up with my grandparents. I still studied at school when the Soviet Union collapsed. In 1996, I graduated from school and started work as an electrician. I then spent six months in Bishkek, sometimes without a job. I also did some wrong things, and I sat in jail for two years. In 2005 I returned to the village, and soon after that my grandparents died. Six months later I married, and now I live here with my wife and my small daughter. My brothers and sisters all live in Bishkek.

We do not have livestock anymore. In Soviet times, my family had five sheep, two goats, two cows and a horse, and we also received five sheep when the kolkhoz was dissolved – one sheep per person. But we have used all of them. We ate them or used them for funerals. Some others were killed by wolves and the rest died from various diseases. But we need animals. You cannot just wait for your salary; we don't receive any pension or *posobie*, so it would be better to have our own livestock – why live in a village if you don't have animals? It would be good to have a cow for the milk, you can give it to the kids or sell it, and if you have sheep you can sell the wool. Livestock is money, and my wife could do this kind of work.

They also distributed barns and machines. Together with other people we received a tractor, but I do not know what happened to it. I just wasn't interested in those things at that time. It was the same with the barn; we just tore it down and used the material elsewhere. There wasn't much anyway.

Nowadays I work as an electrician. People ask me whenever they have a problem with their TV or the counter. So I just work when there is something to do. I usually work in the morning and relax in the afternoon. People pay either in cash or wheat. We have some land of our own, but this year we couldn't cultivate it because we didn't have enough money. We use all the money I earn to cover our daily expenses. From time to time, my sisters come from Bishkek to help us.

Many of my friends tell me to return to Bishkek, but I don't want to leave my parents' home abandoned. This house was built by my father – I think it's good to build a house and leave it to your son. I would like to build a new house soon. But it is difficult to plan ahead for the next five years or so. I would like to live like others: to build a house, to have a car and keep livestock. We just need to stand on our own feet before our daughter goes to school, so that she will get a better education." [JT 1a16]

5.4.2 Smallholders without pastoral cash income ('smallholders')

Smallholders without any pastoral cash income represent 35% of all households in Jergetal and 17% in Kyzyl-Tuu. They all have a small flock of their own, but cannot use it to generate a cash income. The flocks in this group usually consist of about three sheep, three to five goats, plus two milking cows, while only every second household in this group has an own horse. In Jergetal, many smallholders also keep poultry. In terms of per capita land holdings, households in this group are close to the respective local average (89% in Jergetal; 104% in Kyzyl-Tuu); only two households have none of their own arable land. 4% in Jergetal and 9% in Kyzyl-Tuu lease land from the *ayil okmotu* or from other people. Most smallholders use their arable land to grow wheat, barley and fodder crops or to make hay. While only one household (in Jergetal) produces sufficient wheat to sell part of it, every fourth smallholder earns cash by selling fodder or potatoes.

However, the most important cash income source among smallholders is social support. 75% of all households in this group depend fully or partially on pensions, child allowances or the help by others. The importance of child allowances is particularly high in Kyzyl-Tuu (54%). In addition, 34% in Jergetal and 26% in Kyzyl-Tuu have no secondary cash income. Only every fourth smallholder household has someone with a regular job; these are mainly teachers, doctors or technicians. At large, smallholders thus seem hardly better-off than households without animals. They cannot turn animals into cash since otherwise they risk depleting their small flock within no time.

Box 5d A smallholder's household biography

"I got married in 1994 and came to this village to work as a teacher. At the time, we had lots of animals: some cows and thirty to forty sheep. It was hard for me to milk the cows, but it was a good time anyway. Then there was the distribution, and we received more sheep, an old horse and a young yak.

A few years later my husband died, and I somehow had to make a living for my children and myself. Before that, we were cultivating barley and wheat – we did so well that people even came to buy from us. But now we just make hay, and even that is difficult. It is difficult to rent a tractor; you have to pay the driver and buy the fuel. Since I teach at a school and don't want to miss my classes, I have to do the fieldwork early in the morning. In the beginning, I used to pay someone to irrigate my fields. But I was not satisfied, so I irrigate myself now. This year was particularly difficult. In recent years, we could always sell hay to others, but this year we may have to buy some ourselves in order to feed our animals through winter.

When my husband was still alive, we sold lots of animals in order to build this house. Later on there were many feasts: first my husband died, then his brother and also my mother-in-law, and I spent a lot of livestock for the funerals. A couple of years ago I managed to save some of the child allowances to buy five goats. I then sold their wool and bought some more. Today we have 14 goats and three sheep. However, my salary is not sufficient, so we often need to sell an animal in order to buy a bag of flour or a pair of boots. In summer, I send the animals with a herder to the jailoo, but in winter I keep them in the village, because we need the dungcakes to heat the house. We used to buy coal in the past, but couldn't afford to do so this year. Some people say it's a shame to collect dung, but I don't think so. You may have noticed that it's cold in here.

Sometimes I must buy flour on tick, or I must lend money from the neighbors if I am invited for a feast. There are lots of situations when you need money. Today, everything is expensive, money is needed everywhere, and everybody works on his own. Nevertheless, I still want to achieve many things in future, and I am trying as hard as I can." [KT 2b15]

5.4.3 Mid-sized livestock holdings with a main pastoral cash income ('mid-sized farms')

Mid-sized farms with a main pastoral cash income source form quite a large group in both villages. Their flocks are comparably large, 2.7 times the local average in Jergetal, and 1.4 times the local average in Kyzyl-Tuu. An average flock consists of about 40 sheep, 12 to 15 goats, two to three horses and about five milking cows. Poultry is not very common among these households. Nearly all of them earn their main cash income from selling live animals and/or meat. Only one household in Jergetal sells dairy products, while another household in Jergetal and three in Kyzyl-Tuu earn money by herding other people's animals (and thus also belong to the cross-cutting group of herders; see 5.4.5 below).

Mid-sized farms are also above the local average in terms of arable land per capita, with 1.3 times the local average in Jergetal, and 1.2 times the local average in Kyzyl-Tuu. There is no household without arable land in this group, and every fifth household leases additional arable land from the *ayil okmotu* or from other people. Arable land is mainly used to grow wheat and fodder crops and for making hay. The fact that only 10% make some cash income from farming indicates that land cultivation mainly serves for subsistence needs and fodder production. Instead of farming, secondary cash incomes thus mainly include old-age pensions (45% in Jergetal; 37% in Kyzyl-Tuu), regular salaried jobs (18%; 19% – mainly teachers and technicians), as well as self-employed business and trade (16%; 10% – mainly shop keepers, and tractor and truck drivers). The dependence on child allowances and support by others is below average. To sum up, mid-sized farms seem to have more secure income sources than households with less livestock. In addition, they own enough animals to generate cash whenever need arises.

Box 5e Household biography of a mid-sized farm

"I was born in 1935. When I came back from the army I began to drive tractors and combines for the kolkhoz. We received our monthly wages and, once a year, additional payment in the form of crops and hay. It was very nice back then; you can't compare it with today. Then came Gorbachev and there was a mess. I am not sure whether it was planned or happened by accident.

We were six people when they dissolved the kolkhoz, and we received 18 sheep, one cow and a horse. Most of them died soon, but we managed to increase their number again. There's no living without animals, because you cannot live from land alone. If you have five sheep, they will have five lambs, so you have ten. You sell two and keep eight, and soon you'll have sixteen sheep, and so on. We often sell in Tokmok; transport is expensive, but the prices there are much better than in Naryn. Today we have 50 sheep, two cows and three horses. We always ask a herder to take our animals to the summer pastures, there are many of them. My youngest son would also like to go to the *jailoo*, but who would then look after the fields, and who would care for me and my wife?

We also received 1.8 hectares of arable land. It is in three different places, up to six kilometers from here. We use all parcels, but we have problems with seeds and water. And once we solve the seed problem, there's the expensive fuel. Some years ago, my son began to cultivate a hitherto unused piece of land not for from the village. He started cultivating it again, and as soon as the irrigation channels are repaired we will start to grow crops and fodder. We now pay taxes for that land too. Our youngest son lives with us, but he cannot do everything himself, so we sometimes hire people for irrigating our fields, or for cutting our hay. This is also why he can't find any other job – there's just not enough time for that.

So we mainly sell animals to make a living, mostly in autumn when prices are good. I don't like to take out loans, they are so expensive. I also receive an old-age pension, but 2,000 *Som* a month is not enough. The *ayil okmotu* does not care for people; they don't work at all. Life is hard." [JT 3a3]

5.4.4 Large livestock holdings with one or two pastoral cash incomes ('large farms')

This group pools together the wealthiest households in the two villages. The average flock of a large farm in Jergetal contains about 150 sheep, 50 goats, 15 horses and 30 cows. In Kyzyl-Tuu, such a flock consists of about 400 sheep, five goats, 20 horses, 18 cows and two yaks. Thus, large farms in Kyzyl-Tuu seem to prefer sheep and horses (the largest sheep flock in Kyzyl-Tuu contains 700 animals), while also keeping a considerable amount of goats in Jergetal (the largest goat flock in Jergetal counts 120 heads). Consequently, all households in this group generate their main cash income from selling live animals and/or meat. Secondary cash incomes are also often related to pastoral activity, e.g. through the sale of wool (30% in Jergetal; 63% in Kyzyl-Tuu). Others sell dairy products (Jergetal), wheat (Jergetal) or fodder and hay (Kyzyl-Tuu). Old-age pensions are a secondary cash income for another three households in Jergetal.

As regards arable land per capita, large farms in Jergetal have 1.9 times the local average, while in Kyzyl-Tuu it is only 1.1 times the local average. Every fifth large farm in Jergetal and every second one in Kyzyl-Tuu leases additional arable land from other people or from the communal Land Redistribution Fund. With land holdings between 4 and 25 ha, the leased plots are quite large; some of them are also used as winter pastures. Large farms in Jergetal often cultivate wheat, barley and fodder crops, while those in Kyzyl-Tuu make only hay and grow a little barley. All in all, large farms are certainly among the wealthiest households in the two villages; their large flocks allow them to generate sufficient cash without risking falling below the critical limit for sustaining natural reproduction. Analyzing how they have managed to accumulate their large flocks may help to understand better why others have not been able or willing to do so.

Box 5f Household biography of a large farm

"I herded ewes from 1964 to 1994. I was a hard worker and one of the best herders. My parents worked as herders before me, and since I never finished school there was nothing else to do for me than to become a herder, too. So when the distribution took place in 1994, I knew what to do with all the animals we got, because I knew the pastures. There were many people who did not know how to handle the sheep; the paid workers had no experience, so some of them lost their animals. They even bartered away a sheep for only two bottles of vodka, that's about 60 *Som*.

There were 16 people in our family at that time, so we got about hundred sheep and 13 hectares of land. We only make hay; it's too dry for anything else. Along with our relatives, we were also given a barn on the winter pastures. They all agreed that our family could use the barn, so we have it and keep our animals there during the winter. We now have about 300 sheep, 30 cows and 25 horses. In mid-June we move from the barn to the summer pastures where we stay until late September. We always go to the same place I used to go to in Soviet times. After 1994 we also tended other people's animals for a few years, but we don't do that anymore. Our livestock is sufficient for us, so why herd for others if we have more than 300 sheep of our own? There are enough pastures for everyone.

I never bought any livestock to increase my herd. We just kept the animals we had before and those we got in 1994. If we need money, clothes and other things, we sell some animals, but only in autumn when the animals are fat and prices are good. I do not take out loans. We mainly have wool sheep. The wool price increased a lot in recent years; there are several traders on the market. Maybe they work for the Chinese.

I don't plan to further increase the number of sheep; this is the limit. But maybe my sons have different plans. All we want is to live in peace and not to depend on others. We do not want to fly to the sun!" [KT 1a4]

5.4.5 Herding households

Herders play a key role in pasture use and management. They spend several months per year on the pastures, and often tend other people's animals. Thus they not only directly influence livestock and pasture productivity, but also regulate other people's access to pastures. The group of herding households cuts across all other household groups, since it pools together all households that generate their main or secondary cash income from herding other people's animals. The average number of livestock in this group is close to the local average in both villages (95% in Jergetal; 78% in Kyzyl-Tuu), which suggests that households with little or no livestock hardly ever work as herders. A herding household's average flock in Kyzyl-Tuu consists of about 30 sheep, one horse and two milking cows, while herders in Jergetal keep more goats but less sheep. Keeping poultry is uncommon among herders. Their land holdings are average too, with 1.2 times the local average in Jergetal and 0.9 times the local average in Kyzyl-Tuu. There are no households without any of their own arable land in this group. Arable land is mostly used for haymaking or cultivating fodder. One herding household in Kyzyl-Tuu leases additional arable land from relatives to cultivate fodder, while another one in Jergetal leases village-adjacent pastures to compensate for insufficient fodder yields from his own arable land.

As well as tending other people's animals, 50% of all herding households depend on old-age pensions or child allowances as their secondary cash income. Another 30% earn their secondary cash income from selling live animals and/or meat. Only one herding household in Kyzyl-Tuu is able to earn some money from farming (sale of hay and potatoes). To a certain degree, herding households thus represent the local average: they are neither rich nor poor, they have a regular income for a few months a year, and they depend to a considerable degree on external support.

Box 5g Biography of a herding household

"My parents already worked as herders. When I returned from the army in 1985, they were old so I took over their job. I then worked as a kolkhoz herder until 1991. Our family left the cooperative in 1992. We knew that, sooner or later, we would have to work on our own anyway. There were eleven of us at that time, and everyone received eleven sheep. We also got three yaks and a horse.

After that, I could continue to herd a rich man's flock. He had 200 sheep and I had about 100, so that was fine. Unfortunately, the number of animals soon began to decrease – we sold them, or they died. In 1996 we bought this house for 40 sheep. Then the other man also sold his remaining animals and left to town, so I had to stop to work as a herder. So I stayed in the village where I sometimes worked on construction sites, but most of the time there was nothing to do. After a time, life started getting difficult again, because our children grew up and wanted to have clothes and food.

My father then helped me by giving us a cow. We sold the calf, bought goats, and that's how we began to keep livestock again. Today we have fifteen goats, three cows, two calves, a horse and a foal, and a donkey. In 2004, we again started to herd animals for other people. We have six customers by now, the same people every year, so we don't have to look for customers. We have chosen a place near the main road; it's not too far from here, on the way to the summer pastures. It's a good place because we can sell *kymyz* and butter to Chinese truck drivers. If we stay on the pastures, our children live with my sister-in-law for two months so they can go to school. And my two brothers help me to make hay during summer. In turn, we herd their animals for free. Fodder is the main problem here. Until now we have always had sufficient hay, but this year I had to spend 6,000 *Som* on additional fodder. If we had more fodder, we could keep more animals. There are also many diseases.

So we mainly live from herding. It gets difficult when it rains or snows, but we earn quite a lot of money. Our eldest son works on a construction site in Issyk-Kul *oblast*, he also brings some money from time to time. In about four years' time, we'll have to wed him. That's our plan." [KT 2d10]

Having outlined the existing socioeconomic disparities at local level, the question remains as to how and when these disparities have emerged. In the next chapter therefore, I examine what kind of disparities existed in socialist times. Referring to the concept of path dependency (compare 2.2.2), I assume that what is observable today is not just a result of the privatization process and the transformation period, but to some extent also reproduces disparities and inequalities inherent in the socialist economy.

6 "Everything was linked with everything else": working and living in the socialist economy

"Everything was linked with everything else: we had Soviet currency, we were employed by the Soviet Union, and even the TV programs were about the Soviet Union."

Former mechanic, smallholder, Jergetal [2a33]

In his recent study of an Uzbek kolkhoz[74], Trevisani (2007, 100) notes that "the kolkhoz has always been more than just a large-scale collective agricultural enterprise. It pervaded the life of its rural inhabitants as a 'total social institution' that encompassed the whole range of their political, cultural, and economic relations." And Caroline Humphrey, author of the most comprehensive analysis of a Soviet kolkhoz, describes the collective farm as "a massive economic and social experiment" (Humphrey 1983, 1). Obviously, the kolkhoz principle (see 6.1.1), which began to gain ground in the Kyrgyz SSR in the mid-1930s, eventually developed into a system that governed not only the production and redistribution of goods and services, but also the economic, cultural and social relations of the rural population. The biographies of those who grew up under socialist rule are thus often characterized by a high degree of state intervention and dependence on state institutions[75]. As Roy (1999) points out, Central Asian kolkhozes also governed people's social life to such an extent because they were often established on the basis of local identity groups, in the case of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan along tribal units [Kyrg. *uruu*; compare Box 5a]. They thus reinforced already existing social networks over several decades and have, in the words of Roy (ibid., 114), been little more than a "segmented society superficially reshaped along Soviet administrative lines (…)".[76]

The main focus of my research is however at the level of households and individuals, so I am more interested in structures and disparities *within* rather than *between* kolkhozes. In this chapter, I therefore explore the mechanisms and practices which allowed for a certain degree of egalitarianism within a kolkhoz, but at the same time created significant disparities between individuals and households in terms of their status and their endowment with financial, natural and power resources. With reference to the concept of path-dependence introduced in chapter 2, I argue that understanding these mechanisms and the resulting disparities is an essential prerequisite for any analysis of what has happened in rural Kyrgyzstan since 1991, i.e. the various processes of post-socialist transformation.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 6.1 explores the function of the kolkhoz within the socialist economy and describes its internal 'modes of operation', i.e. the so-called 'kolkhoz principle'. The subsequent sections focus on the power relations within a kolkhoz and people's ways of making a living: while section 6.2 analyses the formal and informal income disparities within a kolkhoz, section 6.3 examines people's practices regarding private agrarian production. Finally, section 6.4 discusses the role of the Communist Party within a kolkhoz and its influence on people's livelihoods.

[74] The term *kolkhoz* (literally translates as 'collective farm' (see 6.1).

[75] Many of my respondents have been socialized during and after the Second World War, while the youngest ones have grown up at a time when the socialist system was just about to collapse. Of those with an active memory of the 1930s, when the Kyrgyz were forced to sedentarize and to hand over their private livestock to the newly established kolkhozes, only few have remained. Therefore, the focus of this chapter lies on the second half of the 20th century, and particularly on the 1980s.

[76] Besides the few ethnographic studies, there is a whole body of literature on the kolkhoz from the 1950s up to the 1980s focussing on economic aspects and the functioning of the kolkhoz principle (cf. Jasny 1951; Whitman 1956; Wädekin 1975, 1989).

6.1 Functions and structure of collective farms

The collectivization of the Kyrgyz agriculture started in the late 1920s, when the rural population was forced to settle down in newly established villages. Until then, the majority of the Kyrgyz population had practised transhumance, moving their livestock between winter, spring and summer pastures, with only provisional winter quarters, if at all. Although the sedentarization program met fierce resistance, by the late 1930s, a significant proportion of the rural population had abandoned its transhumant lifestyle and taken employment as specialized workers in the agricultural or industrial sector (Brill Olcott 1981; Farrington 2005)[77]. The new villages – which had usually been delimitated along tribal lines, so that people from the same tribe [Kyrg. *uruu*] settled besides each other – soon became reorganized into kolkhozes. The term 'kolkhoz' is a contraction of *kollektivnoe khoziaistvo* and literally translates as 'collective farm'; it describes a form of collective farming in the USSR. Kolkhozes existed alongside sovkhozes (contraction of *sovetskoe khoziaistvo*), which literally translates as 'state farm' and usually describes larger, more industrialized farm units under direct state control. Kolkhoz members were paid a share of the farm's product and profit according to the number of working days. They were also given land tenure [Russ. *zemlepol'zovanie*] over a small plot of arable land, i.e. a home garden [Russ. *ogorod*] as well as the right to keep a limited number of private animals. By contrast, sovkhozes employed salaried workers (Wädekin 1975; Feldbrugge 1973; Feldbrugge et al. 1985). Rather small entities in the early years of the USSR, many kolkhozes were gradually merged into larger units after the Second World War or converted into sovkhozes after 1960. The two case study villages examined in this thesis both retained their status as kolkhozes up until the early 1990s.

Modern Soviet agriculture soon became based on transfers from the industry as well as on heavy capital investment from the centre in the Union's periphery. The market was highly protected and prices were subsidized, while production was organized vertically, with processing and distribution chains often far away from each other. By the mid-1980s, about 40 million Soviet people were living in kolkhozes. In 1990, there were 179 kolkhozes in the Kyrgyz SSR, each giving full-time work to about 1,100 agricultural laborers and specialists and covering 40,223 ha of land on average, including pastures. Overall, livestock products – beef, veal, milk, mutton and wool – accounted for two-thirds, crops for one-third of the Kyrgyz farm outputs (Dienes 1975; Feldbrugge et al. 1985; Delehanty and Rasmussen 1996; Stadelbauer 1996; Kerven 2003b; Christensen and Pomfret 2007; Ryazanov 2007).

6.1.1 The kolkhoz principle

Although established on an allegedly voluntary basis, kolkhozes were firmly incorporated into the centralized system of planning and control and subordinated to the union republican ministries of agriculture. All land in the USSR being state property, kolkhozes had the right to use the land allotted to them for an unlimited time period; all other assets – animals, machines and built infrastructure – were owned by the kolkhoz as cooperative property, but had to serve the purposes determined by the kolkhoz statute (Feldbrugge 1973, 377ff; Lindner 2009, 72ff).

'Kolkhoz democracy'

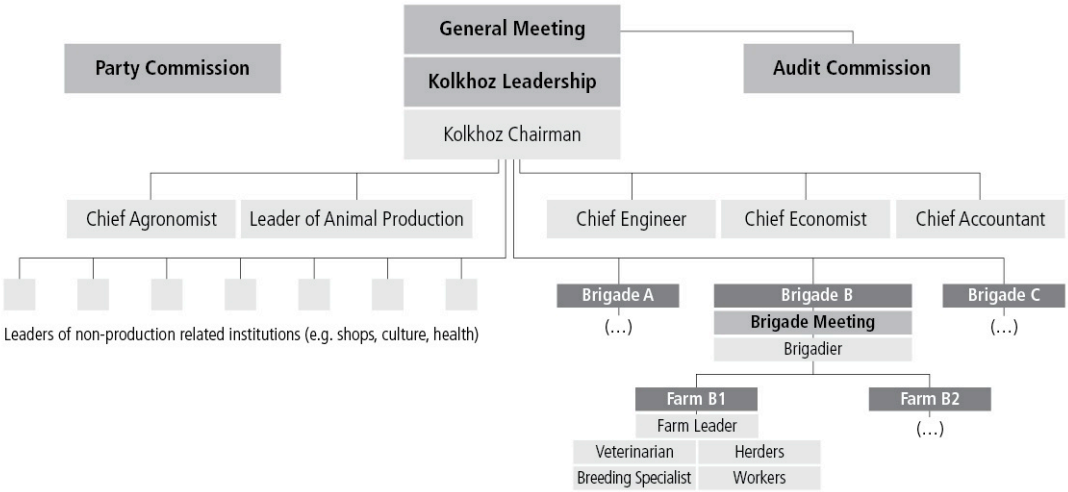
According to the 1969 model charter, amended in 1980, the organizational structure of the kolkhoz had to be based on the principle of 'kolkhoz democracy', with a general meeting of all kolkhoz members [Russ. *kolkhozniki*] as its highest formal decision-

[77] Personal communication with Kalkan Kerimaliev, local historian, Kyzyl-Tuu, 16 Aug 2008. On pre-Soviet Central Asia, see Geiss (2003). For a detailed description of the early years of the collectivized Soviet agriculture in Central Asia, see for instance Wheeler (1964), Dienes (1975) or Jacquesson (2003).

making body (Figure 6.1)[78]. At the age of sixteen, any person living on the territory of the kolkhoz automatically became a *kolkhoznik*, i.e. a formal member of the economic and political entity. Others could become a *kolkhoznik* through official application and the consent of the kolkhoz general meeting (Lindner 2009, 75). Being a *kolkhoznik* entailed particular rights and entitlements. On the one hand, every *kolkhoznik* received a small piece of land for a home garden and was entitled to receive a basic wage according to workdays, as well as additional social benefits (see 6.2.2). On the other hand, a *kolkhoznik* could also vote at the general meeting and stand for public positions within the kolkhoz (Lindner 2009, 75f). However, once registered, a *kolkhoznik* could leave his or her kolkhoz only with the consent of the kolkhoz authorities. Although being a *kolkhoznik* did not automatically mean that someone was a kolkhoz worker, considerable pressure was put on people to become one by requesting their own 'workbook' [Russ. *trudovaya knizhka*] (Humphrey 1983, 132f).

The general meeting, which assembled about four times per year, could also elect an executive board and a chairman for three years – yet only with the prior consent of the local committee of the Communist Party, which was headed by a local party secretary. While formally responsible for public education in the spheres of labor, ethics and atheism, party secretary and -committee usually played a very important role; the main decision power at the local level was usually divided between the kolkhoz chairman and the local party secretary. In addition, every brigade had its own party branch and its own secretary (Personal communication with a former party secretary of the Tien-Shan RayKom, 9 Nov 2007; Humphrey 1983; Feldbrugge et al. 1985).

Figure 6.1 Organizational structure of a kolkhoz (own figure; based on Lindner (2008, 76) and own data)



Organizational structure

A kolkhoz was usually divided into several production units, so-called *brigades*, which at the same time served as new social entities that should take the place of kin-groups and village structures (Verdery 2002, 6; compare Figure 6.1). Each brigade had its own brigade meeting and a brigadier, who was elected with the consent of the kolkhoz leadership. While having great powers within their own brigade, brigadiers were nevertheless completely dependent on the decisions of the kolkhoz chairman. Most brigades were sub-divided into several, often specialized *farms*, with their own farm leaders and several technical experts such as breeding specialists [Russ. *zootechnik*],

[78] The kolkhoz model charter applied to the whole territory of the USSR. According to Lindner (2009, 71) the charter had a harmonizing effect throughout the Union, although it often became renegotiated at the local level.

veterinarians, and herders. A herder was usually responsible for one *atar*, i.e. 500 to 600 sheep. Every farm had its own stables and barns as well as land allotted to haymaking and forage production in order to keep the animals stall-fed throughout the winter.

Box 6a People's perception of state dependency

Today, the state often occupies a very central – usually with positive connotations – role in people's narratives of the past. Many acknowledge that the Soviet government and the related administrative institutions contributed a great deal to the improvement of rural livelihoods in their area. This holds especially true for those who witnessed the decades after the Second World War, namely the late 1950s and early 1960s, when rural Kyrgyzstan received massive support from Moscow to modernize and industrialize the agricultural sector. At that time, many Kyrgyz kolkhozes for the first time received their own machinery, and much of the rural infrastructure that is still visible today – roads, irrigation schemes, stables and barns – stems from that time. It was also in the early 1960s when many of the formerly small kolkhozes became merged into larger units. While this allowed to intensify the agricultural production, the ever-growing objectives of the five-year plans and the integration into the all-Union market eventually increased the rural areas' dependency on subsidies from the centre.

> "Our region could only exist because of the Soviet Union, and because the 15 Union Republics were linked to each other. Tractor motors, for instance, were produced in Kazakhstan – but some parts we brought from Uzbekistan. We could also produce electricity – but the transformers were brought from Kazakhstan. Everything was linked with everything else, (…) and the Russians provided us with everything." (Head of Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, 2007)

The allocative power (compare 4.1.1) of the Russian-dominated central administration at national and regional level was equally reflected at the local level, where most decisions were taken by the – in the case of the two examined kolkhozes, ethnic Kyrgyz – kolkhoz management and the local party organization. In exchange for this monopoly over decision-making, the state 'took care' of its citizens by providing them with everything they needed to lead a decent life, including basic wages, cheap commodities, free education, social and health services, and subsidized recreation.

> "The Soviet state supplied us with everything. (…) Everything was linked with everything else: we had Soviet currency, we were employed by the Soviet Union, and even the TV programs were about the Soviet Union." (Former mechanic, smallholder, Jergetal) [2a33]

It seems that unlike other, mainly urban areas of the Soviet Union, Naryn oblast did not suffer from serious supply shortfalls in the 1980s. Many respondents told me that the kolkhoz shops were always full of a range of products and that prices were always very low.[79]

Every kolkhoz had to abide by the central administration's five-year plans, according to which the kolkhoz general meeting could define annual production plans. The produce was delivered at fixed prices to state purchasing organizations; surplus could be used for the kolkhoz' own needs (such as seeds, fodder) or could be sold on the so-called kolkhoz markets (compare 6.3). The kolkhoz model charter also defined how the profits had to be distributed for paying the kolkhoz workers' legally guaranteed minimal wages, paying income taxes and contributions to the all-Union health insurance fund, and enlarging the kolkhoz assets.

6.1.2 Structure of the two kolkhozes Jangy Talap and Karakojun

Jergetal village was part of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz. The kolkhoz was established in the mid-1960s, when the central planning authorities decided to merge eight smaller kolkhozes that had been set up in the 1930s. The kolkhoz consisted of the three

[79] Compare with section 3.4 about the potential nostalgia bias in people's narratives of the Soviet past.

brigades Jangy Talap (today's Jergetal village), Jalgyz Terek and Kyzyl-Jyldyz. Jangy Talap was the largest brigade with up to 25,000 sheep, 500 cows and 1,000 horses – in spring, when animals give birth, up to twice as much. About 80% of the kolkhoz' production was meat, and 20% wool. According to various respondents, Jangy Talap was one of the richest and most successful kolkhozes of the Kyrgyz SSR as it concentrated all its efforts on livestock and forage production (various respondents 2007/8; Eriksson 2006). The Jangy Talap brigade was further divided into four farms: Jangy Talap, Jergetal, Toguz Bulak, and Baskyia (compare Map 7.1; many respondents also referred to these farms as 'brigades' or 'villages').

Kyzyl-Tuu village was part of the Karakojun kolkhoz, which was formally established in 1936, only six years after the formation of the At-Bashy *rayon*. In the beginning, Karakojun consisted of three kolkhozes, which were eventually merged in the early 1960s. From that time on, the kolkhoz consisted of the two brigades Kyzyl-Tuu and Karabulung and specialized on sheep breeding. In the 1980s, the kolkhoz kept around 45,000 sheep, 200 cows, 1,000 horses and 600 yaks, and up to twice as much during lambing periods. White merino wool was the main product. All in all, Karakojun was not one of the best Kyrgyz kolkhozes, but was still relatively wealthy. The Kyzyl-Tuu brigade was divided into four reproduction farms and one farm specialized in fattening. In addition, 30 to 40 agricultural workers were responsible for haymaking and forage production in order to keep the animals stall-fed throughout winter. Nevertheless, the management regularly had to buy additional forage from the Chuy valley.[80]

6.2 Working in a kolkhoz: social stratification and income disparities

The official socialist discourse strongly promoted an egalitarian society and valued the ordinary worker highly. In the Soviet Union, which declared itself a 'workers' state', farmer and industrial worker were central motifs of state iconography. In reality, however, the strong hierarchies and power imbalances within a kolkhoz often resulted in social stratification and considerable income disparities.

In general, about one-fifth of all kolkhoz members were leading and expert personnel, including the kolkhoz chairman, accountants and specialists with higher degrees such as veterinarians and breeding specialists [Russ. *zootekhniky*], as well as technical specialists [Russ. *mekhanizatory*]. The remaining four-fifths were ordinary kolkhoz workers, including field workers and herders. The large number of agricultural workers was a result of the fact that even by the late 1970s, 65% of all agricultural work in the Soviet Union was still manual. Most management positions on collective farms were occupied by men, while more than 70% of the agricultural laborers were women (Bridger 1987, 59f; see also 6.4 below). As the evidence presented below illustrates, this professional stratification was not only reflected in people's differentiated access to formal wages and premiums, but also in power imbalances regarding the allocation of jobs and, consequently, opportunities to informally improve individual incomes.

6.2.1 Central job allocation, *blat* and professional flexibility

The kolkhoz principle established strong professional and social hierarchies through a strict division of labor. At the same time, the model charter allowed for considerable

[80] Personal communication with a former brigadier, Kyzyl-Tuu, 2007/8.

flexibility in the allocation of jobs and the level of wages (Lindner 2009, 79). Thus, it was usually the kolkhoz management – often together with the local party secretary – that decided about job allocation, e.g. whether someone should work as a herder or a machinist.

> "Later on, the kolkhoz leader could not find anyone to herd the livestock of the kolkhoz, so they gave me one shelter of sheep [kyrg. *bir koroo*; equal to 500 sheep] and told me to herd livestock. That's how I became a herder in 1957." (Former kolkhoz herder, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

Just as people were appointed to a particular position by their leaders, they could be dismissed, for instance if a herder lost too many animals or was generally not responsible. While this allowed for a high degree of planning flexibility and helped to ensure a certain level of professionalism, it also allowed arbitrary appointments and dismissals by the kolkhoz leadership and the party officials.

> "In 1961, our kolkhoz leader decided that another herder should take over my flock. I did not receive anything, although I was entitled to my salary. The reason for that was that the relationship between myself and the kolkhoz leader was pretty bad." (Former kolkhoz herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [3c3]

Good personal relationships with those in power were thus crucial to getting a good job, and this fostered clientelism and patronage within a kolkhoz (Trevisani 2007, 101). The Russian language commonly describes such networks with the word *blat* [Russ. for 'pull' or 'connections']. Although it may include bribery to some extent, *blat* describes a form of cooperation based mainly on trust and mutual support and thus on effective social networks, rather than on monetary compensation alone (Kuehnast and Dudwick 2004)[81]. Humphrey (1983) has also shown that there were often more qualified workers than well-paid jobs in a kolkhoz, so that the local elite could only "retain their positions if they [could] persuade people to work in the very jobs which are avoided. (…) A complex bargaining between officials and workers ensues." (ibid., 300)

However, the administrative allocation and re-allocation of jobs resulted in a considerable – although not always voluntary – professional flexibility of kolkhoz workers. Many changed jobs repeatedly, for instance when the arrival of new machines required new technicians or when the increasing number of animals called for more herders. Thus, while some remained accountants or herders for more than 25 years, others changed their profession several times. It was not uncommon to have a professional biography that involved moving from being an ordinary field worker to a mechanization expert, or from a coachman to an electrician. This was true of both men and women.

> "I herded animals for 11 years and I also worked at the kolkhoz storehouse. Then I worked as a horse farmer, as a salesman at the shop, and I was driving big trucks with goods, called 'auto shop'. So I did different jobs – one was also as an inspector at the *rayon* financial department. I worked for 20 years, and later on I retired." (Former kolkhoz herder, mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a29]

Nevertheless, changing profession within the kolkhoz was only possible with the consent of the kolkhoz management. Given that not only were the basic wages of an ordinary field worker far lower than a chief accountant's but the latter usually had more opportunities to informally improve his/her official income, the importance of the kolkhoz structures to the livelihood trajectories of individuals and households can hardly be overestimated.

[81] Verdery (2002) notes that similar words indicating 'connections' occur frequently in everyday speech in many socialist societies.

6.2.2 Formal income disparities

Along with cheap commodity prices, free health services and education, and a centrally administered social security system, the concept of basic wages was one of the major socialist achievements for the Soviet peasantry[82]. This concept, however, incorporated considerable income disparities.

Ordinary kolkhoz workers

Although formally a voluntary member of a cooperative, the real status of a *kolkhoznik* was very close to that of an employee. A member's right to participate and speak up in meetings was therefore of little practical value, since the important decisions were usually taken by the central planning authorities, the kolkhoz chairman and the local party secretary (Lindner 2009, 77). Workers were paid a basic wage according to the workdays accomplished and could receive extra wages (depending on the kolkhoz' performance) and premiums (depending on their personal performance). Apparently, this system left considerable room for arbitrariness. Even Soviet authors complained that "(…) cases are still not uncommon of the heads of certain kolkhozy and state farms illegitimately depriving people of bonuses and supplementary pay." (Biryukov 1973, cit. in Wädekin 1975, 12). Compared to industrial and sovkhoz workers, kolkhoz workers had relatively poor salaries. Only leading personnel and specialists, including herders, were in full-time employment, while field workers were employed and remunerated on a seasonal basis only, usually between spring and autumn. Given the disproportionately high proportion of female agricultural workers, rural women were particularly affected by this seasonal unemployment, although the disparities were somewhat less pronounced in animal husbandry than in crop cultivation (Bridger 1987, 61f).

However, the income situation in the Kyrgyz SSR was particularly problematic. Although the payment per day worked in a Kyrgyz kolkhoz was above the Soviet average, the income per family member was far below, since a Kyrgyz kolkhoz worker usually had to feed more family members than his Russian counterpart (Wädekin 1975).

> "Clerks and employees, such as myself – I was an accountant – were richer than others. The kolkhoz workers, who did not receive pensions, were poorer than us. They got twelve *Som* [ruble] per month, which was only sufficient for one bag of flour." (Former kolkhoz accountant, large farmer, Jergetal) [3b20]

Additional income disparities resulted from people's unequal incorporation into the state social security system. Until the mid-1960s, there was no central pension insurance fund for ordinary kolkhoz workers, so each kolkhoz had to organize its own old-age pensions. They therefore depended on personal decisions by the chairman, as McAuley (1964, 312) notes: "At the present time no peasants receive old-age pensions from the state. (…) The granting of old age pensions is entirely at the discretion of the kolkhoz chairman and administration. (…) It would appear that pensions are not often paid." It seems that in many cases, only the most worthy kolkhoz workers were allocated a pension by the chairman.

Finally, in 1965, all kolkhoz members became incorporated into a uniform social insurance system, while special allowances for families with many children were introduced in 1977 only[83]. But even then, the situation was anything but satisfactory. According to the rules, a kolkhoz worker still needed to have given 25 years'

[82] According to a respondent from Kyzyl-Tuu, workers of the Karakojun kolkhoz received their first basic wages in 1953: 20 *kopeyky* per working day, an amount which gradually increased thereafter.

[83] From the mid-1970s onwards, an average kolkhoz had to pay social contributions of about 5 to 9% of its gross income to the All-Union pension insurance fund, plus 2.4% of its wages fund to the All-Union health insurance fund. Individual contributions were not required. The All-Union funds then again re-allocated pensions and other payments to individuals through their respective kolkhoz administration (Feldbrugge et al. 1985, 412; Liu 1993, 315).

continuous service to qualify for old age pensions, while approved activities such as party work could attract bonuses (Feldbrugge 1973, 616). Pensions were often inadequate for a decent living and were further devalued by hidden inflation. Some estimates assume that by the late 1980s, 90% of all Soviet rural pensioners were living in poverty (Feldbrugge et al. 1985; Liu 1993, 315).

Kolkhoz herders

Whereas in pre-Soviet times most Kyrgyz families engaged in transhumance by tending their own flock, the kolkhozes employed a few professional herders to look after the farm's livestock. Herders often spent the whole year on the pastures, living with their family in a yurt [Kyrg. *üi-bülö*], tent or house provided by the kolkhoz. They tended the animals according to instructions from their kolkhoz management[84] (Brill Olcott 1981; Dienes 1975; van Veen 1995; Undeland 2005). Although they had no special vocational training, herders often occupied a privileged position within a kolkhoz. They were usually employed year-round on a basic wage and might receive considerable bonuses at the end of the year, when the kolkhoz rewarded them according to their output in terms of wool and live weight. Rewards were given in the form of cash, commodities or medals with impressive names such as 'Lenin 100' or 'Merit of the Red Flag'.

> "At the herders' meeting they gave us furniture, carpets, and fabrics – and 1,000 *Som* [ruble]. At the time, 1,000 *Som* was a lot of money." (Former kolkhoz herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3b8]

Herders were usually respected for the responsibility they bore for the kolkhoz' key capital, i.e. the livestock. Accordingly – and because many herders spent the whole year on remote alpine pastures – the kolkhoz management supplied them with everything they needed to make a decent living in the high mountains. Trucks commuted on a weekly basis between the village and the pastures in order to supply the herders with fresh food, commodities and newspapers, and additional fodder for the animals, as well as transporting helpers (mainly students for the lambing season), doctors and other specialists if required. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rapid expansion of the rural transport infrastructure facilitated access to remote, hitherto unused summer pastures. Herders were then increasingly provided with social and health services in so-called cultural centers [Russ. *kulturnyi zentr*], while more and more barns were built to house the animals in winter. The Jangy Talap kolkhoz also maintained a cultural centre on the remote pastures of Ak-Say, close to the Chinese border. The small settlement consisted of a veterinarian's practice, a shop and a club for herders, as well as a small hostel to accommodate visitors.

> "We, the herders, were like ministers. They transported flour and sugar to the pastures – almost everything. We did not go shopping, as we received the products at home. The herders were supported especially well . We didn't go anywhere to buy clothes, as we received them at home." (Former kolkhoz herder, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2c8]

Salaries were usually paid at the pastures and in cash. According to a former sheep farm leader, the kolkhoz accountants came once in a fortnight to the remote pastures to pay the wages. If a herder or one of his family members fell seriously ill, the management tried to organize a temporary replacement so that people could seek medical treatment down in the lowlands. Many herders also profited from subsidized recreation stays in sanatoria.

> "The party had demands, yes, but at the same time they respected us. They valued our work, so we could go on holiday on time. They sent us to resorts, to Crimea and to Sochi. That is the life we led." (Former kolkhoz herder, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

[84] The kolkhoz management in turn decided according to detailed parameters provided by the central 'State and Land Management Committee' [Russ. Giprozem], which was responsible for the scientific planning and monitoring of rotational grazing, pasture quality and carrying capacity (Meierhans 2008).

However, herding year-round was a tough job full of privations for the herders and their families. In summer, they often had to relocate their yurts (which was provided by the kolkhoz) and their whole household between different meadows. In winter, when temperatures on the remote pastures could drop to –40°C, they often lived in small underground cabins dug into the hillside. In addition, the kolkhoz management often sent them to different pastures every year.

> "We were moving to different pastures. We also went to the remote pastures in Ak-Say. There I gave birth to ten children, they grew up on the pastures. But they received an education. Winter was really difficult there." (Wife of a former kolkhoz herder, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1a4]

6.2.3 Informal income disparities

While most kolkhoz workers had access to different kinds of state services and performance-based bonuses besides their basic monthly wage, some jobs offered better opportunities than others to supplement one's income through informal means. Wädekin (1975, 25) notes that full-time employees had less time to generate additional cash incomes from their home garden and their private livestock (compare 6.3 below), but often had better access to additional in-kind benefits such as feed or fertilizers. In addition, they often kept more private livestock than was officially allowed. The evidence presented below confirms this observation, illustrating the roles and powers certain actors could achieve in a redistributive bureaucracy (rather than pinning an inherent 'desire to cheat' on various actors).

Being *out of* control: herders' opportunities for informal incomes

However, living on the remote pastures also had some undeniable advantages. To live and work far from the village and the kolkhoz accountants also meant greater independence and less surveillance and inspections. Apparently, many herders used this opportunity to increase the number of animals they kept privately, at the expense of the kolkhoz.

> "[Our salary] was not sufficient for ten children. (…) I herded 700 male sheep, [and] I received 76 *Som* [ruble] per month. Imagine – 76 *Som* for 12 people; of course that is not sufficient. So we sold livestock. As I was a herder, I kept more livestock than was allowed." (Former kolkhoz herder, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1a4]

According to the *kontrakt* system (see 6.3 below), no household was formally allowed to keep more than a certain number of sheep privately (usually ten to twenty), but many herders had far more private animals by simply mingling them with the kolkhoz flock. Each herder was usually responsible for 500 to 700 sheep belonging to the kolkhoz, so adding a few dozen of their own animals was no big deal. Supplemental fodder was usually available in abundance, too, so lots of private animals could be fed without raising suspicions. If there was an inspection by the kolkhoz management, herders usually had their own tricks to distract the inspectors, such as hiding surplus animals in remote valleys or in holes. Others brought their private flock to another kolkhoz' pastures when there was an inspection – and this strategy seems to have operated on a reciprocal basis between herders of neighboring pastures.

By and large, however, it seems that the herders' informal practices were an open secret. In their attempt to evade the limitations set by the *kontrakt* system, many people from non-herding households entrusted some of their own surplus animals to one or more kolkhoz herders. In return for decent payment in cash or in alcohol, the herder would then take care of these animals during summer. Many divided their large private flocks into several smaller ones and entrusted small groups of 20 sheep to different herders. This was also practised in winter, when the private animals were

usually kept in the village. When I asked a former head of a *rayon* party committee how he had managed to hide his 70 private sheep, he replied:

> "I had friends who were herding, so I sent my animals with them. The herders themselves had 200 to 300 of their own sheep, and all were kept at the expense of the kolkhoz. The herders lived like kings at that time, they really did!" [2b7]

Being *in* control: kolkhoz and party elites' opportunities for informal incomes

It seems that the kolkhoz and party elites were more often involved in informal, livestock-related practices than ordinary workers. A former kolkhoz chief accountant reports:

> "We usually kept our private animals at home, but gave them to the herders from time to time. There was enough fodder with the herders back then, and you could get fodder in exchange for a bottle of vodka. So our private animals stayed in the kolkhoz stables and ate the kolkhoz fodder. (…) Everything happened at the expense of the kolkhoz." [JT 2b10]

In another interview, a former brigadier listed all the jobs that offered particularly attractive ways of informally improving one's regular income. A salesman could ask for higher prices; a bookkeeper could note down more stables than were actually constructed and pocket the money left over; or the *murab* (irrigation specialist) would irrigate less land than he accounted for. Breeding specialists, farm leaders, accountants and cashiers; it seems that they all had 'their opportunities' (he did not mention, however, the brigadiers). The brigadier ended by saying that it was important to note that, "there were also many honest people".

Obviously, those who were involved in the redistribution of goods and services often had more frequent and better opportunities to informally improve their wages. Kolkhozes constituted an intrinsic part of the socialist redistributive bureaucracy, in which the right to redistribute goods and services meant enjoying the power to allocate resources and determine the recipients and the rules of redistribution. Consequently, this also entailed the possibility to bend these rules to a certain extent (Verdery 2002). It was thus certainly less risky for kolkhoz leaders, party officials or chief accountants to circumvent the rules and regulations, since it was usually they who ordered inspections and inquiries. It can therefore be assumed that there was also a considerable gender bias regarding access to informal incomes, since most leading employees and specialists in collective farms were men (Bridger 1987).

It would also seem that the central committees at national and Union level were aware of such informal practices. A former sheep farm leader from Kyzyl-Tuu reported that the farm leaders received less salary than others in comparable positions "since they [the government] knew that the farm leaders will use the kolkhoz livestock for private purposes." [3b8] Informal practices therefore became an integral part of the redistributive bureaucracy.

Box 6b "…and Dayrakunov cried": the role of the kolkhoz chairman

The kolkhoz chairman often occupies a central role in people's narratives about the kolkhoz. In Jergetal, many respondents still remember and esteem their former kolkhoz leader, Dayrakunov, for his apparently good and wise leadership. Comrade Dayrakunov led the Jangy Talap kolhoz from 1957 to 1987, turning it into one of the most productive collective farms in the Kyrgyz SSR. According to some respondents, Khrushchev himself invited him to Moscow to praise him for his achievements.

What seems particularly noticeable is that in several narratives, the kolkhoz' development is directly linked with the person of the chairman himself. I often heard that "Dayrakunov built this electric station", that "he brought all types of machines" (including the first off-road vehicle in the area) or that "he tarmacked the road". My respondents often related the rapid development of their kolkhoz in the 1960s to the fact that their leader was "a hard worker" and that "he was really concerned" and "taking care of people". A former kolkhoz herder even asserted that Dayrakunov gave free dairy cows to those in need.

Such personalized accounts of socialist development obviously reflect the central role kolkhoz chairmen once occupied. None of my respondents ever related the kolkhoz' achievements to decisions taken by the general kolkhoz assembly or to any other outstanding individual besides the chairman. Since the right to redistribute goods, services and jobs to the peasantry gave them allocative power, it was the chairmen – at least as people saw it – who made community and individual development and wellbeing possible at all. Today, people often assess their heads of *ayil okmotu* according to similar expectations – only there is hardly anything left to be distributed.

For unknown reasons, Dayrakunov fell out of favor with the party in 1987 and was eventually replaced. Soon afterwards, the disintegration of the socialist economy gathered pace and this certainly added to late Dayrakunov's reputation as a capable and just chairman. As one respondent put it: "Dayrakunov was really concerned and he got sick when he thought about all that. 'The work I did for the Jangy Talap kolkhoz was sufficient even for the small children of this village – and now all I've done is spread to the field [scattered to the four winds]', Dayrakunov said, and he cried."

6.3 The 'second' agriculture

In addition to the collective production, every kolkhoz household was officially entitled to a small home garden [Russ. *ogorod*] as well as to a limited number of private animals. This measure was intended to ensure the survival of the rural population through subsistence farming, as the first years after collectivization a time of low production and supply shortfalls. Although productivity in agriculture soon increased, the *ogorod* and private animal husbandry remained important pillars of the Soviet economy throughout the 20th century. In fact, this 'second' agriculture compensated for the central administration's increasing inability to supply its population efficiently with basic goods such as meat, milk, eggs, vegetables and fruits (Rumer 1981; Feldbrugge et al. 1985; Ronsijn 2006).

Private land cultivation: the ogorod

The *ogorod* gained particular importance in Soviet Central Asia in the 1970s, when agricultural wages did no longer grow as much as in other Soviet Republics. At the time, the private farm sector began to grow about seven times faster than the collective sector. Since it was possible to sell surplus production from the *ogorod* on kolkhoz markets, the *ogorod* also contributed to some rural households' cash income. Where prices were not fixed by the state but depended on supply and demand, kolkhoz markets had been tolerated by the state since 1932 and eventually even enjoyed official support.

Women were mainly responsible for cultivating the family's private plots, often in addition to bringing up their children, taking care of the housework and doing paid

labor for the collective farm (Bridger 1987, 60f). It seems, however, that private production in the *ogorod* was not sufficient to sell any surplus, either in Jangy Talap or in Karakojun kolkhoz. Instead, most households used their small home garden (0.15 ha per households in Jangy Talap[85], 0.25 ha in Karakojun) to grow carrots, cabbage, and, first and foremost, potatoes[86]. There was little point in growing wheat on such small plots and since fodder for the animals was usually available in abundance with the kolkhoz, most people simply cut the grass around the vegetable patches.

Private animal husbandry: the kontrakt system and kolkhoz markets

Besides the *ogorod*, each household was officially allowed to keep a small number of sheep and other animals. The limits differed between regions and kolkhozes and changed from time to time. According to a majority of respondents, the official limit in the Jangy Talap kolkhoz was ten sheep, one cow and one horse per household; the Karakojun kolkhoz allowed up to 20 sheep, one cow and one horse. In summer, people were entitled to entrust their private sheep to a kolkhoz herder of their choice, so many sent their animals up to the pastures with a relative or a neighbor. The milking cows stayed in the village and were taken care of by specially assigned 'cowboys'. In winter, private animals were usually kept in the yard.

Most people used their private livestock to cover their subsistence needs and to serve to guests at large feasts such as weddings or funerals. As far as the commercial use of private animals is concerned, however, there are a wide variety of responses. Some respondents insist that there was no need to sell animals against cash, since the wages and pensions paid by the kolkhoz were sufficiently generous and commodities were affordable. Others, however, sold or bartered their animals from time to time at the kolkhoz markets or to their neighbors. But, irrespective of this, many households used to keep more animals than allowed, sometimes up to five times the official sheep limit (compare 6.2.3). Some even kept goats, even though this was officially forbidden by the kolkhoz management.

There were three basic ways to sell private livestock. The first one was the compulsory *kontrakt* system, according to which excess private livestock had to be 'sold' to the kolkhoz at fixed prices per kilogram. In practice this meant that in autumn, the kolkhoz collected the offspring, i.e. lambs, calves and foals, to integrate them into the kolkhoz' flock, which thus grew steadily.

> "To deliver an animal as 'kontrakt' means that the animal was weighed and paid for by the kilo. An animal hardly every brought in more than 150 rubles. So this was what 'selling' an animal meant." (Former *zootechnik*, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [3b18]

Animals that did not have to be delivered as *kontrakt* – usually adult animals – could be sold in two ways. On the one hand, they could be delivered to governmental collection points. Such points existed in every *rayon* to deliver livestock to the large meat processing units. According to a former brigadier, they often paid better prices than the kolkhoz management. On the other hand, animals could also be sold at the so-called kolkhoz markets, for instance in Kochkor or At-Bashy. The market prices were more or less free and not necessarily higher than government rates. One respondent even told me that some people used to buy animals on the market in order to resell them to the kolkhoz at a better price.

System failure or pragmatic compromise?

In the early 1980s, private *ogorod* production accounted for 30 percent of the whole Soviet agricultural production despite covering only 1.6 percent of all arable land

[85] Due to population pressure, the initial size of the *ogorod* in Jangy Talap was reduced from 0.25 to 0.15 ha (Eriksson 2006, 24).

[86] The importance of the potato for people's subsistence in the socialist and the post-socialist era can hardly be underestimated. See Ries (2009) for a highly readable essay on the 'potato ontology'.

(Eriksson 2006). About half of all vegetables and about one-third of all meat and milk was privately produced. Wädekin (1975, 25) assumed that private agricultural activity was especially attractive for those – often female – collective or state farm workers who were under- or seasonally employed and thus had enough time to cultivate their private plots. However, in the Kyrgyz SSR private cultivation was severely constrained by the limited availability of arable land and water for irrigation (Rumer 1981; Ronsijn 2006).

As it could hardly be explained by socialist ideology, many Western scholars in the Cold War period took the existence of this 'second' agriculture as evidence of the socialist system's failure. More contextualized studies, however, reject the simple opposition between collective and private production. Instead, they interpret the complex and often blurred relations between the private and the public as a symbiotic relationship and as a constructive and pragmatic compromise. The *ogorod*, private animal husbandry and the kolkhoz markets played a significant role in the population's food supply in the Kyrgyz SSR, but they would hardly have performed so well without the informal transfers of inputs from the state economy (Humphrey 1983; Stadelbauer 1996; Hann 2003; Lindner 2009; Lindner and Moser 2009).

6.4 Good worker, good communist: working in a highly politicized economy

Kolkhozes were highly politicized economic entities. This is less due to the formal concept of 'kolkhoz democracy' described above, than to the fact that local Communist Party representatives had an important say in the appointment of kolkhoz chairmen and other leading personnel. From the 1950s on, no appointment of leading kolkhoz personnel could be made without Party approval (Bridger 1987, 81). This meant that usually only members of the Communist Party could get ahead within the socialist economy. Lindner (2009, 79) notes that around 1970 more than 90% of all kolkhoz chairmen were party members. At the same time, women were starkly underrepresented in the Communist Party so they were hardly ever promoted to leading positions. In 1980, only 1.9% of all kolkhoz chairpersons and 7.3% of all deputy chairpersons in the USSR were women. Even livestock brigade leaders were predominantly male (65%), despite the disproportionately high share of women employed in animal husbandry (Bridger 1987, 218).

Often enough, kolkhoz chairmen were dismissed due to deviation from the ideals of socialist agriculture (cf. C.Z. 1959). It is thus impossible to separate the economic from the political sphere when talking about the livelihoods prospects of people living and working in a kolkhoz. The abovementioned examples of clientelism in the allocation of jobs and the nexus of allocative power and informal enrichment I have described inevitably raise the question of what kind of livelihood advantages ordinary *kolkhozniki* enjoyed from joining the Communist Party.

Becoming a party member

Not everyone in a kolkhoz was necessarily a member of the Communist Party. Those who were interested had to officially apply before passing through an elaborate entry procedure. The procedure included interviews by a special committee during which applicants were asked for their professional activities and their familiarity with socialist ideals. In addition, the committee gathered information at local and *rayon* level about the applicant's professional performance and whether he/she had ever committed a crime (which made it virtually impossible to join the party). After that, applicants were given a one-year probation period before being accepted as a full party member.

Figure 6.2 "Every kolkhoznik, every brigade, every MTS [machine station] must know the Bolshevist seeding plan" – Poster by V.N. Elkin, Moscow and Leningrad, 1931 (www.russianposter.ru; accessed 29.4.2010)

"Not everybody could become a party member; they chose people who worked hard and who were really interested in working, who had a white heart [read: who were brave] and were honest." (Former kolkhoz herder and party member, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

Thus, the decision about whether someone could enter the party or not was intrinsically tied to individual work performance. Consequently, those within the party considered themselves hard workers, while viewing others as lazy – a link that some people even uphold to the present day:

"As a party member you had to work hard, and you got used to this, and this was good for your future life. Some people did not join the party – they cannot hold their boots now [read: they are lazy]. They still live in the same way as they lived before – they don't work." (same respondent)

It is hardly surprising that non-members perceive this differently. A former kolkhoz herder who tended livestock for 41 years but never applied for party membership told me: "They had so many meetings. After all, I had to herd livestock." [JT 2c8]

Being a Party member

Actually, participating in meetings was the fundamental right and responsibility of any party member, along with paying the compulsory membership fee. According to former party members, a Communist was considered a 'respected person' who was allowed to 'speak out' and who served as an example for others in terms of his/her commitment to work.

> "I had a party booklet in my pocket, so I was forced to fulfill the plans." (Former kolkhoz herder and party member, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

Besides this personal appreciation, however, a party membership also entailed some – at least indirect – material benefits, especially with regard to education and jobs:

> "It was easier to get into university, have an education and find a job. If you wanted a better job, you had to be a member of the Communist Party." (Former mechanic, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a3]

Thus while party membership did not directly affect people's wages, it nevertheless increased their chances of getting a better-paid job. One respondent, who had never finished school but nevertheless had worked in many different jobs before eventually becoming a brigadier, told me that he would never have had the chance to get so many different jobs if he had not been a party member. Others also said that they had received material support for private matters, for instance when their house had to be

repaired. On the whole, however, it seems that a party membership primarily entailed indirect benefits in the form of *blat;* those people who had allocative power over jobs could thus facilitate access to better formal and informal wages.

* * *

To sum up, people's accounts of their life in the Soviet Union make clear that the socialist system of rational distribution and the kolkhoz as a 'total social institution' led to far less equality and social justice than was promised by the socialist ideals. Instead, existing hierarchies emphasized a close link between professional and political status and allocative power over resources, which allowed certain people to accumulate more wealth than others. As a result, socioeconomic disparities at local level were already in place when the Soviet experiment came to an end, although even the less wealthy could to some degree profit from the existence of a 'second economy'. It can therefore be assumed that these disparities also influenced the distribution process of the early 1990s.

7 The dissolution of two kolkhozes

"We entered this process without any preparation, without understanding what the reform is and how to go on, and we did not know our possibilities (…). They just gave us the livestock (…)."

Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal [3a15]

When the Kyrgyz government decided in the early 1990s to privatize the agrarian sector and to dissolve all collective and state farms, it initiated much more than a simple distribution of formerly state-owned means of production. Instead, it triggered a process of much wider social and political significance. I have shown in Chapter 6 that the Soviet kolkhoz was not simply an economic unit of agarian production but also a social and political entity governing the social relations of its members far beyond the agricultural production process. Despite the egalitarianism promoted by the official socialist discourse, there were many social and economic inequalities inherent in the kolkhoz system. While its elites such as chairmen, accountants and some technical staff, but also herders, could often profit from formal and informal benefits, many ordinary kolkhoz workers received only little wages and few additional benefits. Thus, the kolkhoz principle led to a stratification of rural societies through considerable disparities in livelihoods and distinct social relations between various groups and individuals. Hence, the redefinition of property rights over land, livestock and other resources after 1991 led to fundamental alterations in social relations locally. Former professional hierarchies were broken up, causing a redistribution of allocative power, which Verdery (1991) identified as the basic law of motion of the socialist economy (compare 4.1.1). This does not mean, however, that the privatization process did away with all former disparities and dependencies at local level. I have already argued in Chapter 4 that a considerable gap between the government's official *transition* policy and what I call local processes of post-socialist *transformation* may be assumed. The resulting hybridity may have caused many internal contradictions and loopholes, paving the way for a sometimes illicit appropriation of resources.

In this chapter, I therefore examine the local processes of transformation during the privatization period in the two former kolkhozes of Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu. The chapter is thus a further step towards a better understanding of the current livelihood disparities in the two case study villages as described in Chapter 5. I argue that a detailed analysis of the dissolution of the collective farms, with a focus on people's practices and the role of different actors during that process, helps to understand better why rural livelihood trajectories have diverged so far since 1991. In this chapter, I therefore try to reconstruct what happened in Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu between 1991 and the early noughties, i.e. between the time when Kyrygzstan gained independence and the formal end of the privatization process. The chapter is organized as follows. Section 7.1 focuses on the early years of independence (1991 to 1994), when only inefficient collective farms were allowed to begin with the distribution of assets to individuals and households. Section 7.2 analyses the heyday of privatization (after 1994), when both kolkhozes examined for this study had to distribute all their means of production. Due to the complexity of the different processes, the section discusses the distribution of arable land, livestock and other means of production separately.

7.1 The early years of independence in Karakojun and Jangy Talap (1991-1994)

In early 1991, the Kyrgyz government adopted the first legislative changes to allow for more private entrepreneurship at local level. Inefficient collective farms were allowed to distribute land-use shares and other means of production to those kolkhoz members who wished to establish their own peasant farm (compare 4.1.3). While Karakojun was an average, hence rather inefficient kolkhoz, Jangy Talap was among the republic's most efficient farms. Consequently, the two collective farms followed a slightly different trajectory between 1991 and 1994.

7.1.1 Karakojun: transformation into a 'pseudo-cooperative' and separation of first private farms

The government obviously considered the Karakojun kolkhoz unprofitable enough to authorize voluntary privatization. At the same time, the then Minister of Agriculture, Talgarbekov, suggested transforming such collective farms into so-called cooperatives. Since the government promised continuing state support for these cooperatives, the formal transformation of the Karakojun kolkhoz was already accomplished by 1992. However, the change of corporate form was little more than cosmetic: the organizational structure remained more or less that of a kolkhoz, with the same chairman, the same professional hierarchies and the same unhealthy dependence on state support.

> "They had the idea not to distribute the livestock and the machines. I do not know whose idea it was. (…) We organized the cooperative and we changed the word 'kolkhoz' into 'cooperative'. We thought that we would carry on as in Soviet times, but there was no support from Moscow [anymore]." (Former *mekhanizator* and teacher, large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a7]

While most people decided to join this 'new cooperative', about ten to fifteen households used the early opportunity to start their own farms and claimed their shares in land-use rights, livestock and agricultural machines in 1991. They then received 0.8 ha of arable land and twelve sheep per capita, plus some farm buildings and machines that they had to divide among themselves for further use. However, since this meant taking a considerable economic risk, it was mainly those who could rely upon a secure cash income and/or who knew about the desolate economic situation of the kolkhoz and the central state that decided to do so, among them many members of the kolkhoz elite.

> "I wanted to work on my own, because I knew that this cooperative would not work well. The kolkhoz was already in a poor condition when they decided to form a cooperative, as all state support had already ended." (Former brigadier, large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a9]

A few other households left the cooperative in 1992. The majority, however, were neither ready nor able to take such a risk. Today many of those who stayed in the cooperative say that they did not really understand 'what was going on' at that time and that 'everything happened very quickly'. Many people also did not trust the new official policy that suddenly permitted private entrepreneuership and feared that the state would sooner or later reclaim all the land and livestock. Some even thought that the collapse of the USSR was but a temporary crisis, and that Moscow would soon recover. Yet things were just about to get much worse.

At national level, the effectiveness of this first step towards private agriculture remained negligible. Giovarelli (1998, 11) notes that "the process for restructuring farms and the rights of individual farm members were not outlined in detail (…) so

that people did not have clear choices or even an understanding of their options." Many local bureaucrats also simply resisted the first orders from their new government. In addition, while the existing agricultural infrastructure, originally designed for large-scale farming under the Soviet command system, did not suit the requirements of small farming units, legal hurdles[87] made it impossible to create larger and more efficient farms through the purchase of land from others. Thus, only about 10,000 private farms had been established by 1994 (Jones 2003, 263).

7.1.2 Rapid decline of the Karakojun 'cooperative'

Despite the government's initial promises of continued support, it soon became clear that subsidies for the agricultural sector and for rural public infrastructure were quickly drying up and that the state was increasingly unable to offer competitive prices for agricultural goods or to pay on time (Bloch et al. 1996; Stadelbauer 1996; Trouchine and Zitzmann 2005; Ronsijn 2006). As a result, the Karakojun 'cooperative' soon found itself unable to maintain production and to keep the number of animals constant. The kolkhoz management could not supply its wage fund any more, the All-Union pension insurance fund[88] dried up, and wages and old-age pensions could no longer be paid. In addition, the inflation quickly devalued people's cash savings. What followed was a period of rapid economic decline and pauperization of the rural population.

> "The cooperative was barely able to survive for three years; there was no supply from the government. (…) The prices for the products [inputs] increased a lot and we could not sell livestock at good prices. We could not even buy a bag of flour for one sheep." (Former *mekhanizator* and teacher, large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a7]

Having no fodder for the animals or cash to pay off the mounting debts, local leaders soon began to sell and barter away the cooperative's livestock through different channels. It seems, however, that the sales revenues were not always used for the benefit of the cooperative but often served the personal enrichment of the local elite.

> "Before the distribution took place, some leaders used the livestock; they knew already that the kolkhoz would be dissolved. For example, these leaders said that the kolkhoz was in debt, and that they had to pay off these debts – but in reality there were no debts, so they used [the animals for] themselves." (Head of Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, 7 Dec 2007)

> "The former kolkhoz leaders used the livestock of the cooperative – the brigadiers, the vets and the doctors. (…) They used the livestock and gave people various reasons, for example that they had bought fuel or tools needed for the machines. The people understood the situation only later on, in late 1994." (Former brigadier and storehouse leader, mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a29]

Many other respondents give similar accounts, confirming that the years between 1991 and 1994 were anything but transparent. It seems that local leaders in particular had an uneasy sense of the cooperative's future and tried to make the most of this for their own family's benefit. A former kindergarten teacher reported that the cooperative sold off the kindergarten's furniture for very small amounts of money. According to a former brigadier, even well-respected *Aksakals* started to panic:

> "It was all haywire back then. In 1992 I was still a brigadier, and one day a few Aksakals asked me whether they could help us during the hay harvest; they knew that they would be allowed to keep some of the harvest for themselves. So they helped us, and in the end they brought the hay to the village. Five times they drove back and forth, and every time they piled the hay so high that in the end hardly anything was left. That was unfair, but it was the general mood before the dissolution: everybody grabbed as much as they could." [3a9]

[87] Compare with 4.3 for the first reforms of the Kyrygz land legislation.
[88] For an explanation of the Soviet social security system, see 6.2.2.

All in all, the number of former kolkhoz animals quickly decreased, fodder yields declined and debts swell further so that, by early 1994, the only viable way was to dissolve the 'cooperative' and to distribute all the remaining means of production.

7.1.3 Jangy Talap kolkhoz: unavoidable distribution

Since it was considered an efficient and wealthy farm, the Jangy Talap kolkhoz was neither transformed into a 'cooperative' in 1991, nor was it allowed to distribute resource shares to those who wanted them. Nevertheless, the savings of the once wealthy kolkhoz were soon eaten up, and the management became unable to pay its workers and employees any longer. Pensions and child allowances, which had been paid in advance so far, suddenly ceased. As a result, the importance of private home gardens and flocks further increased.

> "In the beginning, life seemed more or less normal, but we soon got into the economic crisis that started in 1991. (…) Until 1995, people remained jobless; they just survived on their home garden and their animals. Everyone tried to eke out a living, nobody cared for us." (Former party chairman at *rayon* level, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2b7]

It seems that just as in Karakojun, parts of the kolkhoz and the local party elite made use of the general disorder and the lack of control from higher state levels to enrich themselves. Within two years, about a third of the once 72,000 kolkhoz sheep and the whole budget of the kolkhoz had disappeared.

> "The *oblast* and the *rayon* [party] committee and the kolkhoz leader (…) they used things for themselves, they sold livestock and other things. They only distributed the livestock afterwards. (…) The kolkhoz had four million *Som* [ruble] in its budget, but nobody knows where this amount was spent. Nobody ever asked for this money." (Former kolkhoz herder, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

Many respondents also blame the former kolkhoz herders for not taking care of the kolkhoz animals anymore after 1991. Since they would have known that the kolkhoz was soon to be dissolved, they would have diverted the healthy and most valuable animals to themselves and their relatives, so that by 1994 there were only sick animals left over for the ordinary kolkhoz workers. It remains difficult, however, to substantiate such accusations – as in Karakojun, veterinarian services and fodder supply ceased to exist in the Jangy Talap kolkhoz, so that it became increasingly difficult keeping the animals in a good condition.

7.2 Breakup of kolkhozes (1994 onwards)

In view of the rapid decline of the agrarian sector and the rapid impoverishment of the rural population, the Akaev administration in early 1994 declared decollectivization compulsory for all collective and state farms (compare 4.3.2).

In the case of Kyzyl-Tuu, however, a general village assembly in early 1994 decided to dissolve the recently created cooperative before the higher levels of the state administration began to exert pressure. By contrast, the final dissolution of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz only began after an order from the *rayon* administration, although the distribution of the kolkhoz livestock had already begun[89].

[89] Personal communication, former chief kolkhoz accountant, 11 November 2007

7.2.1 Distribution of land use shares

Distribution of arable land in Kyzyl-Tuu

The distribution of land-use shares seems to have taken place without any major problems or conflicts in Kyzyl-Tuu. Shares were calculated and demarcated according to the legally defined procedure and every eligible individual[90] was allotted a 0.8 ha share of arable land. The land was distributed along tribal structures so that people from the same tribe usually received parcels close to one another[91]. Many households received their cumulated land shares (e.g. a total of 4 ha for a household of five) in a single place; in some cases, however, the land was split into two or three parcels. All shares were basically defined as 'irrigated land' [Kyrg. *sugat jer*], although the irrigation infrastructure – concrete channels, locks and dams – was often in a deplorable state.

The location of the distributed land parcels seemed of little importance; hardly anybody ever complained that his/her fields were too far away. This may be due to the fact that the area with arable land is rather compact and not too far from the village (compare Map 9.1). An example from the northern part of the village illustrates that the immediate vicinity of a plot of land to the settlement may even have a detrimental effect. In 2000, several households from the same tribe offered to the *ayil okmotu* to exchange their irrigated plots against other arable land far from the village. They did so because they had repeatedly suffered crop losses from trespassing animals that were kept in the village over the summer. The *ayil okmotu* accepted the deal and offered them other, still rain-fed land from the communal Land Redistribution Fund. Their previous land was then allotted to young families for housing construction.

Distribution of arable land in Jergetal

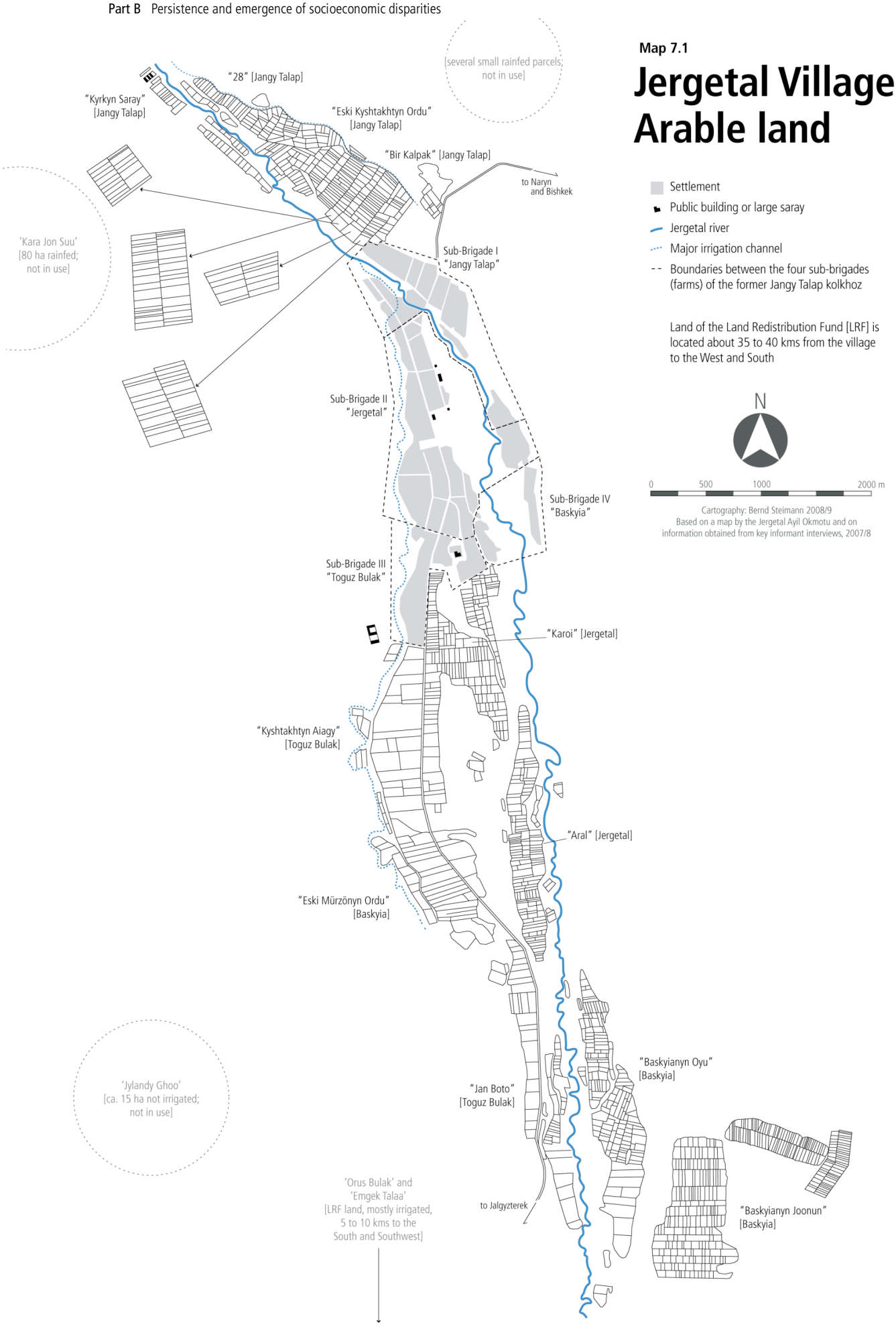
Things were much more complicated in Jergetal. Since the 1960s, the kolkhoz was organized in three brigades – Jangy Talap (today's Jergetal village), Jalgyz Terek and Kyzyl-Jyldyz – each with its own allotted arable land. Therefore, land was distributed in each brigade separately. The Jangy Talap brigade was further divided into four different production entities, indiscriminately referred to as 'brigades', 'farms' or 'villages' (compare with 6.1). Again, each of these entities had its own allotted arable land to grow fodder crops. However, since every inhabitant of the Jangy Talap brigade was legally entitled to the same amount of arable land, it was not possible to treat the four sub-brigades separately.

Distribution was eventually carried out in autumn 1994. As a first step, the total amount of irrigated arable land available for distribution (745 ha) was arithmetically divided by the total number of kolkhoz inhabitants (2,759)[92]. Consequently, every eligible person was entitled to 0.27 ha of irrigated arable land, plus 0.09 ha of rain-fed land. As a second step, the land use shares were physically distributed. For unknown reasons, the local commission together with the land experts from the Naryn *rayon* decided to start with the two sub-brigades III (Toguz Bulak) and IV (Baskyja; compare with Map 7.1). As a consequence, most households from these sub-brigades received their irrigated land in one single plot close to the village. Then the inhabitants of the other two sub-brigades I (Jangy Talap) and II (Jergetal) received their land, but

[90] See 4.3.2 for a definition of who was eligible to receive a land use share.
[91] It seems, however, that these tribal affiliations did not have much influence on the subsequent use of arable land (compare with Chapter 9).
[92] Figures according to the former chief accountant of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz who was responsible for the calculation and delimitation of land use shares.

Map 7.1

Jergetal Village Arable land



hardly any large parcels close to the village were left, so many of these households received their irrigated arable land in several small, far-scattered parcels[93].

> "We received land for seven people. But it is too scattered; it is located in six different places. In one place we have only seven *sotik* [0.07 ha]. It would be good if the land was in one place, not scattered [like this]. It is very difficult to do farming now and that is why livestock is very important." (Teacher, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2f3]

However, the distribution of irrigated arable land was also affected by the kolkhoz' history. While the four sub-brigades of the Jangy Talap brigade were separate hamlets during the kolkhoz' establishment in the 1960s, the settled area grew constantly, so that some arable land between the four hamlets had to be delimitated for construction. The concerned sub-brigade II (Jergetal) was then compensated with other arable land far from the village – not a serious drawback in times of subsidized fuel and transport, but the value of this property has depreciated considerably since 1994. Unlike in Kyzyl-Tuu, where most fields are comparably close to the village, the arable land in Jergetal stretches over a distance of about ten kilometers along the Jergetal river. Some parcels are even as much as 35 kilometers from the village, in a place called Orus Bulak near the Naryn river. Consequently, many people nowadays complain about their scattered land property and the difficulties they face in cultivating it (see Chapter 9). Surprisingly, there were hardly any open conflicts over the apparently unequal distribution of arable land in Jergetal. According to the head of the Jergetal Aksakal court, most quarrels arose about the size of the distributed parcels, while their often unfavorable location was not a subject of legal disputes. In 1994 already, every household received a legal document defining the location, quantity and type of its land-use shares. In 1996, these provisional documents became replaced by official extracts from the land register. These are valid to the present day.

However, quarrels did not only arise over the location of land parcels, but even over certain people's eligibility to receive a land-use share at all. Thus, the committee in charge initially refused to allot a land use share to the wife of a former herder from the Jangy Talap kolkhoz. The man, who had worked in town for 25 years as a truck driver, returned in time to his former kolkhoz to take part in the distribution of arable land. He took along his children, but left behind his wife to look after the house. The committee then denied him his wife's land-use share, insisting that she appear in person. Only after intensive debates, the committee gave in.

> "They did not want to give me my wife's share. There were six of us in the family then. So I said to the people: 'I'll bring nine women tonight, and every one of them will say that I'm her husband. Will you then give all of them their share?' After that, they gave me my piece of land." (Former kolkhoz herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [3c3]

While the anecdote gives vivid account of the quarrels related of the distribution of land use shares, it also contains a first reference to many (male) respondents' perception of property rights over arable land. When talking about 'my land', the respondent is supposedly referring to customary law, according to which women are not seen as owners of the land, even though the national land legislation entitles them to their own individual share (see 9.2.2 for more details).

People's perception of the local commissions

It remains unclear when exactly the local commissions responsible for the distribution of land shares were established in the two villages. According to a former *rayon* land-use specialist who participated in various local commissions in the mid-1990s, most of them consisted of about 40 to 50 people, including former kolkhoz elites, *aksakals* and

[93] Unlike irrigated land, most rain-fed land is located far from the village and of little interest for most users, since the lack of irrigation infrastructure makes its cultivation virtually impossible. Therefore, the distribution of rain-fed parcels did not cause much excitement. Most respondents have not even mentioned their rain-fed land during the interviews.

other well-respected people from the village. Many kolkhoz agronomists joined the commission because they were best qualified to carry out the often complicated calculation and demarcation of land parcels[94]. It may be assumed that after three years of mismanagement and economic decline, the fact that so many of the former kolkhoz elite were now in control of the final distribution of assets raised suspicion among ordinary workers. This may at least explain why later on, when they realized that their land-use shares were of little practical value, many people in Jergetal started to complain about the distribution process and the commission's work, an accusation, however, which the former chief accountant of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz who was a member of the land commission decidedly rejected:

> "That's not true. Maybe the ordinary field workers said so, but they had no clue about the privatization. Everything was handled very justly and fairly, because we had a commission." (Former chief accountant of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz) [3b20]

7.2.2 Distribution of livestock

Distribution of livestock in Kyzyl-Tuu

Just as for land sharing, livestock was distributed in several steps in Kyzyl-Tuu. However, since the number of kolkhoz animals decreased significantly between 1991 and 1994, those who claimed their shares in 1991 and 1992 received twelve – usually healthy – sheep per household member, whereas those who participated in the final dissolution of the 'cooperative' got only five – often sick – sheep per capita. The same was true of big animals such as cows, horses and yaks. In 1991 and 1992, every 'private' household got at least one horse and up to six yaks or cows, while in 1994, there was usually not more than a single horse or a yak per household left. Apart from this dramatic drop in the quantity and quality of kolkhoz livestock in the space of just three years, the distribution seems to gone off without any major problems or conflicts. This does not mean, however, that the process was entirely fair. According to a former brigadier, some herders and members of the former kolkhoz elite managed to divert the young and healthy animals into their own yards, leaving the old and sick ones to their neighbors. This may explain people's widely differing perceptions of what they received in 1994:

> "We received a small yak, but they told us that it was not possible to keep it in the village, so we slaughtered it. (…) We also received some sheep and a very old horse." (Teacher, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

> "We received 90 or 100 sheep, and for ten people one horse was distributed. (…) They were healthy – the livestock which I have now is left over from that livestock. Some people were able to sustain the number of their animals, and some could not." (Former kolkhoz herder, large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a4]

Although the 1994 distribution was carried out in early spring, most recipients did not send their animals to the spring pastures, often because they did not have anyone to take them there. Consequently, most people tried to keep their animals in their yards and around the village. The resulting fodder shortage not only killed many of the old and weak animals, but caused heavy losses during the lambing period that began a few weeks later.[95] With the benefit of hindsight, the distribution of single yaks appears particularly questionable. Usually kept in large herds in the high mountains all year round, a single yak in the village is of little use. Therefore, nearly all people immediately slaughtered the yak they received, and the once large yak herd of the kolkhoz was lost in no time.

[94] Personal communication, 24 May 2007

[95] The practice of keeping the animals all year round on the village-adjacent pastures also led to a rapid deterioration of the pasture quality close to settlements (compare Chapter 9).

Distribution of livestock in Jergetal

Even before the arrival of the official order from Naryn *rayon* to finally dissolve the Jangy Talap kolkhoz, the kolkhoz leadership decided in December 1993 to start the distribution of the remaining animals. It remains unclear, however, why distribution began in the middle of winter. It seems that the kolkhoz leaders felt increasingly unable to feed all the remaining animals through winter and considered the privatization of flocks as a last resort. Thus, between December 1993 and April 1994, all animals were distributed among the kolkhoz' inhabitants along with the kolkhoz' remaining fodder reserves. Unfortunately, most recipients were equally unable to take care of these animals and the distribution process soon turned into a debacle.

Sheep were distributed per capita, while big animals such as cows, horses or camels were allocated to families. People's accounts of the exact number of sheep received per capita vary from one to ten, while it seems that three to four animals was the average. The confusion may arise from the fact that the distribution of livestock took place in several steps, since the kolkhoz animals were kept in different brigades and farms, making it impossible to distribute all of them at once. Besides sheep, every family received a horse and/or a cow or calf, depending on the number of family members. Some also received a camel or a yak. However, it soon turned out that the exact number of animals received per capita and family was of little importance. In the middle of winter, people had no other choice than to squash their new sheep into the same small stables with the sheep they already had – with the result that by spring 1994, most of their animals were dead.

> "The number of animals increased quickly, and they did not fit into the stables anymore. For instance, we had ten sheep before [the distribution], but then their number grew to forty; yes, about thirty to forty… I was about 17 or 18 years old then. The stables were full in winter – and by the beginning of spring there was a pile of dead bodies. The kolkhoz sheep infected our ten animals, too, and by the end we only had two or three sheep left." (Young farmer without livestock, Jergetal) [1c9]

The disease that killed so many animals that winter was mange, a contagious skin disease caused by parasitic mites. Obviously, the disease had already befallen a large part of the kolkhoz sheep when the distribution started, and afterwards spread quickly through the cramped barns among the often malnourished and weak animals.

> "Before I received this livestock, I had my own corral of 30 sheep, but I lost them, too. (…) All the animals died because of the mange; that year, even the dogs did not eat the dead bodies, and the skin was not valued. (…) The time was not right for distribution." (Former *murab*, smallholder, Jergetal) [1a10]

Under normal circumstances, such a disease could have been handled without much loss. In the absence of sufficient fodder and adequate medical treatment, however, the effect was devastating. The former kolkhoz veterinarians, who had not been paid for years, were not only overwhelmed with work; they were often simply unable to help, since there was no appropriate medicine available anymore. Many people reported that the only drug left, a Chinese product named 'Gralin', was of little help because it had to be diluted in water to dip the animals – a virtually impossible endeavor given the constant sub-zero temperatures. Most of the surviving animals were soon slaughtered or bartered away, often for very small sums of money or a few bottles of vodka. Deprived of their cash income and with a rapid inflation devaluing their savings, many households had no other choice than to exchange their livestock for cash and commodities.

Advantages of herders and the kolkhoz elite

People's accounts indicate that the former kolkhoz elite and the kolkhoz herders had several advantages during the distribution of livestock. On the one hand, some of them had the possibility to divert the young and healthy animals to their own yards before

distribution began – or not to take any livestock at all, such as the son of a former kolkhoz chairman in Jergetal, who refused to take his share of kolkhoz animals:

> "I did not want to receive any livestock. The animals were all sick; they would just have eaten fodder for nothing. I knew that they were sick and that they would not survive." (Son of former kolkhoz chairman, large farmer, Jergetal) [2d1]

On the other hand, the herders' professional knowledge and experience helped them to cope with all the difficulties related to animal husbandry after 1994. Unlike herders, many former ordinary *kolkhozniki* such as field workers, milkmaids, *murabs* and mechanization experts did not know how to keep a large number of animals, let alone how to fight against disease. After decades of collectivized livestock production, most of them were accustomed to a kolkhoz herder taking care of their private animals, to constant fodder supply from the kolkhoz, and to veterinarians being available in the case of diseases and injuries. By 1994, however, all former kolkhoz herders and most veterinarians had stopped working for others, since they had not received their salary for years and were now busy with their own flock. It was not until three to four years later that some of them began working as herders again (see 10.2).

7.2.3 Distribution of immovable property: machines and *sarays*

Distribution of immovable property in Kyzyl-Tuu

In Kyzyl-Tuu, agricultural machines and *sarays* – barns and small houses on the pastures – were distributed along tribal lines. Every tribe [Kyrg. *uruu*; see Box 5a] received a certain number of machines and *sarays* according to its size. The tribe leader [Kyrg. *uruu bas'chy*] was then in charge of negotiating the further procedure within the tribe[96].

In the case of **machines**, most tribes decided to sell the tractors, trucks or combines to one or several of their tribe members and to distribute the money equally among themselves (usually according to the number of family members). In most cases, former kolkhoz drivers and *mekhanizators* bought the machines, since they also knew how to drive and repair them. In one case, people agreed on fixed prices for the machines and then drew lots among all those interested in buying. It seems, however, that the negotiations and the amounts agreed upon varied considerably among the various tribes. While some said they received a share of 1,500 KGS from the sale of a combine, others complained that they had received only 30 KGS from the sale of a tractor.

By contrast, only a few tribes sold the ***sarays*** immediately after the distribution. Instead, they were divided into equal portions and every household received a couple of meters of one of the usually long buildings. Most people then dismantled their share, using the bricks and parts of the roof for renovations to their own houses in the village (Figure 7.1). The reason *sarays* were hardly ever sold within the tribes was that their material value was often close to zero. In addition, only few were interested in having their own barn, given the rather gloomy prospects for animal husbandry. Some, however, refrained from wrecking their share and tried to use it for their own animals. Again, this mostly included former kolkhoz herders who soon after privatization started to take their own animals to the pastures again. Later on, some of them also managed to take over their relatives' (often destroyed) shares, either in return for payment or free of charge (compare with 10.4.5).

[96] In the case of the households who claimed their shares in 1991 and 1992, machines and barns were not distributed along tribal lines but according to the total number of individuals. The households then had to negotiate themselves about the further distribution.

Figure 7.1 A ransacked saray outside Jergetal: only the concrete walls remain (photo by the author, 2007).

Distribution of immovable property in Jergetal

The procedure was slightly different in Jergetal. Agricultural **machines** were not distributed among the tribes but remained with the *ayil okmotu*. Tribes or individuals could then lease a machine for common use for a period of five years (apparently free of charge). After that, the lessee – usually a former kolkhoz driver – had the right to buy the machine from the *ayil okmotu*. It seems, however, that the *de facto* procedure did not always follow this principle. Several respondents' accounts indicate that they were not at all aware of that possibility, believing instead that the machinery had been given to their tribe for common use and had then suddenly disappeared.

> "As far as I know our tribe received one tractor, but it was not used. They stole it and then it somehow disappeared. (…) We did not use it, it did not [even] work for one year, then they drove it to the garage where it disappeared." (Former tractorist and *murab*, smallholder, Jergetal) [1a10]

Thus, many former drivers and *mekhanizators* sooner or later gained possession of a truck, a tractor or a combine and began to rent out their driving and harvesting services to their neighbors for cash. In many cases, however, the lack of fuel or spare parts forced them to resell the vehicle again, so that a few years later only a few functional machines were left in Jergetal. By contrast, ***sarays*** were distributed along tribal lines and usually wrecked by the recipients. In several cases, however, barns were stolen or destroyed before the legal owners had the possibility to use the material for their own purpose:

> "We [our tribe] also received a barn, and we asked one guy to look after it. He sold all the material, got drunk and finally burned the barn. We couldn't complain to anyone – he had nothing..." (Former kolkhoz herder, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

As in Kyzyl-Tuu, a few individuals later on started to purchase their neighbors' shares in order to rebuild them for their own use (see 10.4.5).

* * *

To sum up, the privatization of the Kyrgyz agrarian sector not only reproduced but sometimes also aggravated pre-existing local disparities. Therefore, the following summary asks whether the collapse of the socialist economy can be seen as a continuous process of unequal resource allocation, rather than a 'new beginning' in the form of an equal and just distribution of private property rights.

8 Summary and conclusions

Basing my analysis on survey data collected in spring 2007, I examined in Chapter 5 the current situation in the two case study villages regarding the distribution of natural resources and cash income sources. The results show that socioeconomic disparities are often striking, especially at household level. On the one hand, there are many households that have no animals of their own, as well as numerous smallholders with only small private flocks. On the other hand, there are a few large farm households with large private flocks and access to more private arable land per capita than others. There are also considerable disparities regarding people's dependence on external financial support. Results show that households without animals and smallholders more often depend on child allowances and/or support by relatives and neighbors than mid-sized or large farm households.

These disparities make obvious that a neoliberal understanding of post-socialist transition as a linear, unidirectional process starting from scratch helps little to grasp what happened after 1991. The massive gap between rich and poor indicates that either the neoliberal transition policy itself failed to create equal chances for everyone or that disparities already existed at the outset of reforms, which would mean that the approach of a 'tabula rasa', upon which a new order could be erected, was completely wrong. Most probably, both are true, as the empirical evidence presented in the three preceding chapters suggests.

In order to solve the puzzle, I have examined when and how the currently existing socioeconomic disparities emerged in the course of the late socialist period (Chapter 6) and the early years of independence (Chapter 7). The evidence presented suggests that local processes of transformation can best be described by referring to the concepts of path-dependency (cf. Pavlinek 2003) and hybridity (cf. Hopfmann 1997a; Koehler and Zürcher 2004; see 2.2.2) put forward by the 'sociological transition critique'.

8.1 The role of the socialist legacy

On the one hand, the evidence presented in Chapter 6 illustrates how the communists' "massive projects of social engineering" (Verdery 2002, 6), i.e. to end all forms of inequality and depression, managed to achieve a certain degree of egalitarianism. By the second half of the 20th century, the socialist economy and the kolkhoz as one of its main production units had established free healthcare and education, state-sponsored social security and the concept of basic wages. These social institutions have undoubtedly contributed to a general and massive improvement in living standards in rural Kyrgyzstan. Today, these are a substantial factor in many respondents' generally positive appraisal of the Soviet Union[97]. Although some of these achievements did not materialize before the 1970s for many ordinary kolkhoz workers, most people still refer to the socialist era "as a kind of baseline in their constructions of their lives" (Hann 2006, 4).[98]

[97] See 3.4 on the potential nostalgia bias.

[98] Roy (1999) even argues that tribal and socialist structures on a collective farm often merged into what he calls a 'kolkhozian collective identity'. According to him, this identity is still deeply rooted in post-socialist rural societies, maintaining a minimum of social safeguards or political protection for former kolkhoz members in uncertain times. However, while this may be true in rural Uzbekistan, where many collective farms still exist, the dissolution of Kyrgyz kolkhozes (as described in chapter 7) seems to have seriously damaged such an identity.

The symbiotic relationship between state, collective and private economy may be another reason for many people's positive retrospective attitudes. The excellent performance of private agrarian production in the *ogorods*, which secured the survival of the rural population, could only be upheld due to massive transfers from the state and collective economy to private production at household level. Not all of these transfers, such as the use of kolkhoz fodder or labor force (herders), were necessarily illegal. Instead, they took various forms, from informal arrangements between leading personnel and ordinary workers to outright robbery. Thus, the boundaries between state, collective and private property were often blurred (Lindner 2009).

On the other hand, the mode of operation of the socialist agriculture and the kolkhozes caused and reinforced considerable inequalities among the rural population. The redistribution of goods and services as the pivotal point of the socialist economy and the allocative power bestowed to a few, mostly male individuals benefited a comparatively small rural elite, and thus fostered livelihood inequalities among individuals and households. Local Party elites and the kolkhoz management were entitled to reallocate the physical and financial resources provided by the central administration within their kolkhoz. This not only took place directly through the payment of wages, bonuses and in-kind benefits, but also indirectly through the allocation of jobs, which entailed different opportunities to formally or informally access additional resources or allocative powers. I have shown for instance that herders enjoyed various indirect benefits, first because they were in control of the kolkhoz' key resource – livestock – and second because they were usually far from the eyes of the kolkhoz authorities. Consequently, many of them built up their own private flock at the expense of the kolkhoz and helped others to do so too by illicitly allocating them fodder for their animals. In addition, people's accounts on the role of the Communist Party at local level suggest that the sphere of agrarian production was closely tied to the political sphere. This further disadvantaged women, who were poorly represented in the Party. Party members hardly ever received direct material benefits, but often benefited from better access to attractive jobs and from *blat*, i.e. good contacts with those holding allocative power. Thus, existing inequalities were to some extent due to differences in political power rather than to differences in production.

Professional careers and allocative power

It thus seems that – at least in the context of the two kolkhozes examined – social realities were far from the egalitarianism propagated by Soviet ideology, but were instead characterized by considerable socioeconomic disparities. Formal and informal income disparities not only existed between the few leading personnel and specialists on the one hand and ordinary workers on the other, they also existed between men and women because Party control, prejudice and overwork often barred the way to promotion for the latter (Bridger 1987, 81f).

Consequently, it seems anything but far-fetched to assume that, by some means or other, these disparities have influenced the privatization process of the 1990s. Table 6.1 lists all respondents' professional careers in the socialist economy and sorts them according to their current socioeconomic status, i.e. to the household typology developed in Chapter 5.

Table 8.1 Professional careers and positions of respondents in the kolkhoz, by household groups. Jobs with a considerable degree of allocative power are underlined.

	Professional careers of respondents in the kolkhoz
No livestock	Assistant *kolkhoz* accountant Tractor driver >> *murab* Tractor driver Student (2 respondents)
Smallholders	Tractor driver >> *murab* Mechanic & driver (3) Ordinary field worker >> mechanic & driver Baker >> saleswoman >> employee at the post office > sewer Ordinary field worker >> assistant *murab* Ordinary worker Teacher (3) Herder >> *Komsomol* secretary >> senior *leskhoz* accountant >> journalist Herder >> coachman >> combine driver >> military service >> tractor driver >> truck driver Herder Student
Mid-sized farms	Tractor driver >> herder >> *murab* Ordinary field worker >> *murab* Ordinary field worker >> electrician >> mechanic & driver >> *murab* *Murab* >> military service >> herder Mechanic & driver Driver >> drivers' brigadier >> storehouse leader Teacher Lawyer Veterinarian Brigadier Herder >> storehouse worker >> salesman >> truck driver >> inspector at *Rayon* Financial Dept.
Large farms	Driver >> teacher Teacher Ploughman >> driver >> herder Driver >> student >> *kolkhoz* economist *Kolkhoz* chief accountant Herder Brigadier
Herders	Herder (5) Tractor driver >> military service Electrician

This list is not statistically representative of the local level. It suggests, however, that households which are better-off today, i.e. mid-sized and large farms, often relied on a job in the socialist economy with certain allocative power, such as accountants, brigadiers, herders, or *murabs*. By contrast, smallholders and households without livestock are often those of former ordinary kolkhoz workers. Needless to say, there are also exceptions to the rule, such as a former assistant accountant of the Jangy Talap kolkhoz who lost all his livestock and lives in total poverty today. However, the socialist legacy in the form of people's professional status and their allocative power gained in the kolkhoz became even more crucial when in the early 1990s, the state-led economy was dissolved and the final round of resource allocation was initiated.

8.2 Privatization: path-dependent processes in a hybrid institutional context

The events prior to the full dissolution of collective farms and the subsequent, locally diverse privatization processes indicate that it was not the collapse of the socialist economy alone that caused the rapid socioeconomic decline of the early 1990s. In fact,

the privatization process itself also contributed to the ensuing rapid rural pauperization, both in terms of its objectives and its implementation.

Collapse of the kolkhoz as a 'total social institution'

The collapse of the socialist economy and the dissolution of collective and state farms not only triggered economic transition, it also caused a fundamental transformation of social structures and of the institutional and organizational context. The collapse of the kolkhoz as a 'total social institution' affected former kolkhoz members and their families in many different ways. On the one hand, the state's sudden inability to further pay basic wages left thousands of people unemployed and deprived them of their formerly secure access to production-related benefits such as cash and in-kind bonuses. This sudden income uncertainty was further aggravated when state subsidies for food items and other commodities dried up and rapid inflation quickly devalued people's ruble savings. On the other hand, women and old people were particularly affected when social welfare institutions such as old-age pensions and child allowances, kindergartens and paid maternity leave, were cut back or ceased (Spoor 2004; UNDP 2005a, 11). Last but not least, the collapse of communist party structures, which had governed people's access to jobs, in-kind benefits and social prestige in the socialist era (compare with 6.5), forced many individuals to reorganize their social and professional relations.

At that time, the persistence of the former *kolkhoz* markets and the *ogorod* more than ever protected the rural – but also a considerable share of the urban – population from famine. The second economy thus stepped in where the formal state-led economy had disappeared (Ronsijn 2006). It would be wrong, however, to understand this transformation simply as a triumph of private over state-led agrarian production. I have shown in Chapter 6 how large-scale kolkhoz production and small-scale private production formed a kind of symbiosis. On the one hand, the often excellent performance of private animal husbandry under socialist rule could only be maintained due to constant, usually informal transfers from the state-led economy (e.g. the illicit use of kolkhoz fodder for private animals or the employment of kolkhoz herders to herd animals during summer). On the other hand, the kolkhoz system survived for more than 60 years only because private production ensured the survival of the rural population. Alexander Nikulin (2002, cit. by Lindner and Moser 2009, 6) therefore rightly points out that any analysis of transformation processes of former collective farms should start from the idea of *mutual dependence* between the state and the private economy rather than of *rivalry* between the two.

Ineffective distribution aggravates uncertainties

The government's decision in early 1994 to make distribution of all means of production compulsory for all collective and state farms was meant to counter the rapid economic decline. In line with neoliberal thinking, the expectation was that a general and equal distribution of natural, financial and physical assets would empower rural households to take the lead in agrarian production and marketing and make the agrarian sector more efficient. Yet evidence from the two case study villages suggests that this aim was not always achieved. Instead, many individuals and households soon encountered increased livelihood and knowledge uncertainties (compare with 2.4.2).

First, the distribution was often ineffective and badly planned. The allocation of livestock in Jergetal was done in the middle of winter and resulted in a disaster. Not only did most of the distributed kolkhoz sheep die within a few weeks, they also infected people's own animals. In the end, many households had lost all their animals, and thus their most valuable financial capital in a time when hyperinflation devalued all forms of cash savings. Second, while timely, well-organized distribution of sheep could have worked out well in principle, the rapid distribution of other assets appears at best questionable. In Kyzyl-Tuu, the breakup of large yak herds resulted in a quick slaughter of most animals for people's own needs, since yaks could not be kept alone

and at a low altitude. In a similar way, the distribution of land use rights – transformed into formal ownership rights only later on – and the resulting fragmentation of large fields into hundreds of usually small, far-scattered parcels, did not necessarily increase people's food security in times of need. Third, the distribution of assets was also ineffective in the sense that people were anything but prepared to fulfill the new role the politicians and their neoliberal advisors had foreseen for them. Due to the division of labor in the kolkhoz economy, many of the newly endowed private peasants had very little experience of animal husbandry or land cultivation, let alone marketing skills. Their prospects of making a living were thus aggravated by considerable knowledge uncertainties.

> "We entered this process without any preparation, without understanding what the reform was and how to go on, and we did not know our possibilities as we do now. (…) It would have been better if (…) a seminar would have been held on how to go on and how to work. At least before the distribution, such as 'Hey people, there will be a distribution, so do like this and this afterwards!' That would have been better. But they just gave us the livestock (…)." (Farmer and entrepreneur, smallholder, Jergetal) [3a15]

From this point of view, the privatization process certainly aggravated and accelerated rural pauperization in the short run and increased uncertainty for many. In only four months, a considerable proportion of rural people's financial capital was ruined and many were forced to start again from scratch. Consequently, many respondents remember the years immediately after privatization as the most difficult time of their lives.

Privatization in a hybrid institutional context

Others, however, managed to benefit from their kolkhoz' dissolution, because they were well positioned when the Soviet Union collapsed. The initially slow and ineffective reform process (compare 4.4) left considerable room for arbitrariness at local level, much to the former kolkhoz elite's advantage. Many chairmen and chief accountants stayed in power until 1994, when the kolkhozes were definitively dissolved. According to many respondents both from Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu, much of their kolkhoz' machines, money and livestock disappeared during that time. It seems that unlike the ordinary *kolkhozniki*, many of the leading staff knew quite well that their collective farm would no longer exist. Apparently, some of them then used their still existing allocative power over the kolkhoz' remaining resources to secure their own livelihoods. Thus, being in a position of sufficient allocative power in 1991 (compare Table 6.1) was undoubtedly a considerable advantage for coping with the difficult years to come. Later on, the same leading personnel often participated in the local commissions responsible for the allocation of land use shares and other assets in the early years of independence (compare 4.1.3). At least in its initial stages, the process of abolishing the old socialist system and of replacing it by new market mechanisms was thus to a considerable degree implemented and governed by the protagonists of the allegedly outdated socialist system. In other words, the implementation and enforcement of the new institutions was entrusted to those people who profited most from the old institutions. In the absence of effective controls from above, a minority of people was thus in a position to define the 'rules of the game' and to refer to those normative and cognitive frameworks that helped them best to lay claim on certain resources. Interestingly, though, similar practices were reproduced at a lower level: of the remaining machines and *sarays* passed from the local administration to the various tribes for further distribution, many were illicitly appropriated, too.

From this point of view, the privatization of the Kyrgyz agriculture took place in a hybrid institutional context. Far from being a just and proper distribution of assets along neoliberal rules, it was rather a final round of resource allocation along practices and social networks inherited from the socialist economy, including the exertion of allocative power, hierarchical relations between people and groups, patronage and the use of *blat*. Consequently, some actors had more power than others to lay claim to

certain assets and to accumulate more or better resources than the rest. This hybridity even became reflected in colloquial Russian language, which soon came up with a new expression for a phenomenon that so many had witnessed in the early 1990s: *prikhvatizatsia* – 'grab-itization' – combining the Russian word for privatization with the verb *prikhvati't* [Russ. 'to grab'].

With the benefit of hindsight, many respondents said that it would have been much better to distribute all land, livestock and infrastructure in 1991 already. Obviously, those residents of Kyzyl-Tuu who claimed their shares in 1991 or 1992 got a much better bargain, since they did not have to bear the costs of a minority's often excessive enrichment between 1991 and 1994. Swain (2000, cit. by Hann 2003, 12) thus aptly comments that in addition to an economic weakening of the farm sector "(…) decollectivization (…) had perverse consequences for social differentiation, reinforcing barriers it was ostensibly supposed to eliminate". The first decade of independence in rural Kyrgyzstan was thus a truly hybrid process. On the one hand, it brought an unprecedented array of new formal rules and a fundamental redefinition of property rights over resources, which also altered social and political relations at the local level. On the other hand, and somewhat contrary to the expectations of neoliberal reformist thought, people's organizing practices, power relations and structural constraints inherited from the socialist era persisted and had a massive influence on the distribution process. At the turn of the century, however, the formal distribution of land and livestock in the two former kolkhozes was complete and people increasingly started to seek ways to make the best use of their new property rights over resources. Part C therefore concentrates on the actors, practices, organizations and institutions surrounding current agro-pastoral livelihoods in the two case study villages.

Part C
Actors, practices, organizations and institutions around agro-pastoral livelihoods

Introduction

The provision of secure private property rights over resources was one of the key principles of the Washington Consensus, which considered private property a necessary prerequisite for rapid economic growth. However, the way in which the distribution of resources was carried out and the structural legacies of the kolkhoz as a 'total social institution' resulted in locally specific development trajectories. Eventually, these led to the reproduction of already existing and emergence of new socioeconomic disparities at the local level. Nevertheless, most households in the two villages are endowed with property rights over resources today. They own several plots of arable land, most of them still have their own livestock (some more, some less) and many households still own a few meters of a barn or stable. In addition, they have access to the various pastures which were officially assigned to their community and which are managed according to certain rules and regulations – at least on paper. In practice, however, people's property rights over these resources often appear less secure than the term may suggest. As I have argued earlier (see 2.3), people's property rights over arable land, pastures and infrastructure are not only regulated by legally defined ownership rights, but also by certain cultural norms, by social relations between various actors, and by the various practices people deploy to access and manage these resources.

In the next three chapters, I therefore examine local property relations over land, livestock and pastures in more detail. For most rural households, these relations form the basis to earning a living through agro-pastoral production. For my analysis, I refer to the four layers of property as put forward by Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006; see 2.3.3), as well as to Appendini and Nuijten's (2002; see 2.3.4) conceptual distinction of organizing practices, institutions and organizations. I have argued earlier that property is a central institution in all societies and in the most general sense concerns "the ways in which the relations between society's members with respect to valuables are given meaning, form and significance" (Hann 2006, 22). This is why I consider the analysis of property relations an adequate entry point for an analysis of the recursive relationship between actors and institutions in general, and thus also for the analysis of local processes of post-socialist transformation.

Without aiming to be comprehensive, Table 9.1 provides an overview of assets, actors, organizing practices, organizations and institutions found relevant in regard to land cultivation (left column; Chapter 9), and livestock and the use of pastures (right column; chapter 10). The distinction between the two is mainly for the sake of clarity. Most rural households engage in agro-pastoral production, so that relevant assets, institutions, organizations and practices often overlap. In one way or the other, most of the issues listed are discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Table 9.1 Important actors, practices, organizations and institutions around land cultivation, animal husbandry and the use of pastures (based on Appendini and Nuijten 2002; see 2.3.4)

	Important actors, practices, organizations and institutions around land cultivation	**Important actors, practices, organizations and institutions around animal husbandry and the use of pastures**
Assets / Capitals	**Natural:** Arable land, irrigation water, seeds, crops, hay **Physical:** Machinery, means of transport **Financial:** Livestock, cash, credits, loans, savings **Human:** Labor, knowledge, experience **Social:** Networks, relations	**Natural:** Pastures, fodder, hay **Physical:** Barns, means of transport **Financial:** Livestock, cash, credits, loans, savings **Human:** Labor, knowledge, experience **Social:** Networks, relations
Actors	Individual farmers Farming households Machine owners Flour mill owners Agricultural workers *Murab* Communal land use specialist Private credit providers	Individual herders Herding households Livestock owners / 'customers' Naryn *rayon* pasture expert *Rayon* representative of the State Forest Department *Rayon Akim* Head of *ayil okmotu* Communal land use specialist Private and communal veterinarians Private credit providers Traders and middlemen
Organizing Practices	Cultivating land Irrigating land Selling output Purchasing and selling land Leasing out/in land Acquiring land (informally) Negotiating input prices (machinery, labor, irrigation) Harvesting crops / cutting hay Practising *Ashar* Taking out loans Cooperating with others	Herding animals Moving to/from pastures Acquiring 'customers' Negotiating prices and terms for herding Selling pastoral products Concluding pasture lease contracts Acquiring pastures (informally) Building and using a *saray* Practising *sherine* among herders Slaughtering animals Celebrating life-cycle events Taking out loans Cooperating with others
Organizations	*Rayon* GosRegistr *Ayil Okmotu* *Ayil Kengesh* LRF commission *Aksakal* council & court Water Users' Association Local cooperatives Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance (TPS) Commercial credit providers Local credit self-help groups NGOs	National Pasture Department *Rayon* administration *Rayon* GosRegistr *Rayon* Architecture Department *Rayon* State Forest Department [Russ. *leskhoz*] *Ayil Okmotu* *Ayil Kengesh* *Aksakal* council & court Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance (TPS) Pasture Users' Association Commercial credit providers Local credit self-help groups Private mining companies NGOs
Institutions	Household, family, kin, tribe *Ashar* / *Adat* / *Tooganchilik* *Aksaskals* *Tülöö* meeting *Sherine* circles; 'black cashbox' system Agricultural commodity market Labor market National Land Code Land Redistribution Fund (LRF) Property rights over land and water Tax regime; child allowances Micro-credit schemes	Household, family, kin, tribe *Ashar* / *Adat* / *Tooganchilik* *Aksakals* *Tülöö* meeting *Sherine* circles; 'black cashbox' system Pastoral commodity market Labor market National pasture legislation Property rights over pastures Tax regime; child allowances Micro-credit schemes

9 Actors, practices, organizations and institutions around land cultivation

"I can't put the land into my pocket or take it home. The land stays…"
Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal [3a3]

In view of the neoliberal paradigm behind the land reforms, this chapter analyzes how the newly established small peasant households can access and make use of their arable land for their livelihoods, and whether or not they have become 'powerful actors in a free market economy'. The main questions addressed in this chapter are as follows: how do local farm households cultivate their land, and what problems and opportunities arise for them by doing so? How do they transfer land within the household and between generations, if at all? How do they act within an emerging land market that – at least *de jure* – allows them to sell, purchase and lease land? Besides that, analysis also focuses on people's access to other production factors, such as water for irrigation, workforce, machinery, and cash.

The chapter is organized as follows. Before entering into the qualitative analysis of people's practices around land use, section 9.1 describes the disparities regarding land holdings and cultivation patterns at the local and the household level. Section 9.2 then examines how people access arable land, how land is transferred within and between households, and what role the Land Redistribution Fund and the taxation of arable land play. People's access to additional production factors – water for irrigation, machinery, workforce and cash – is analyzed in section 9.3. Section 9.4 then looks at the current state of agrarian commodity markets and examines whether and how rural producers can market their yields. Finally, section 9.5 asks why in recent years an increasing number of households have turned away from crop cultivation altogether.

9.1 Land resources and cultivation patterns: disparities at the local and the household level

The semiarid climate and the high average altitude of Naryn *oblast* result in a rather short annual growth period of 60 to 120 days and a general dependence on irrigated farming (compare 5.1). While Kyzyl-Tuu (2,320 m amsl) has more arable land, Jergetal (2,150 m amsl) not only profits from a longer growing period but also from a better irrigation infrastructure, due to its proximity to a river and to recent investments in maintenance. As a result, the two villages differ considerably in terms of the quality of their arable land (irrigated versus rain-fed land) and of the predominant cultivation patterns.

Land resources

In quantitative terms there are considerable differences between the two case study villages. According to local statistics, Jergetal *village* disposes over 675 ha of arable land. Since most fields are close to the river (compare Map 7.1), nearly all land is rated *sugat jer* [Kyrg. 'irrigated land']. For Kyzyl-Tuu, land data is available for the *ayil okmotu* level only. Together with the neighboring village of Kasybek, Kyzyl-Tuu has a

total of 3,234 ha of arable land. Some of this land is quite far from the next river, so that not all fields can be irrigated, but are rated as *kairak jer* [Kyrg. 'rain-fed land'][99].

Disparities at household level are equally significant. Table 9.2 lists the average land holdings of the five household groups and the proportion of households in every group that lease additional land from other households or from the communal Land Redistribution Fund (see 9.2.3). Obviously, households with a lot of private livestock also own comparably large areas of arable land per capita and lease land for cultivation more often than others. The figures thus highlight the important relationship between animal husbandry and land cultivation but also suggest that not all households in the two villages have been able to use their private arable land in the same way since the official land distribution in the mid-1990s.

Table 9.2 Per-capita land ownership and share of households leasing in arable land by selected household groups (own data, 2007)

	Jergetal			Kyzyl-Tuu		
	Households [n]	Average land [ha/capita]	Share of HHs leasing in arable land	Households [n]	Average land [ha/capita]	Share of HHs leasing in arable land
No livestock	52	**0.19**	2%	21	**0.64**	**5%**
Smallholders	137	0.25	4%	43	0.82	9%
Mid-sized farms	56	0.37	21%	68	**0.94**	18%
Large farms	10	**0.51**	**29%**	8	0.89	**57%**
Herding households	16	0.33	**0%**	13	0.71	8%
Village	395	0.28	7%	252	0.79	12%

Cultivation patterns

Land cultivation varies greatly between the two villages as well as among households in qualitative terms too. In Jergetal, about 65% of all arable land is used either as hay meadows or for the cultivation of fodder crops (sainfoin and clover). Wheat and barley are cultivated on the remaining land (Jergetal Baseline Study 2008, 10). However, not all household farms in Jergetal can use their arable land in the same way. Figure 9.1 shows the cultivation patterns of all responding households in autumn 2007[100]. It indicates that most wealthier households can cultivate a larger variety of crops than their asset-poor neighbors. While many of the former cultivate hay, nutrient-rich fodder such as sainfoin and clover, and wheat and barley, most of the latter have only hay – if, that is, they can cultivate their land at all.

[99] For a description of irrigation practices, see 9.3.1

[100] Figures 9.1 and 9.2 do not include agricultural production in the *ogorod* [Russ. 'homegarden']. Since nearly all households in the two villages use their small *ogorod* to cultivate potatoes, cabbage and carrots for subsistence needs, I will not discuss *ogorod* production in this chapter.

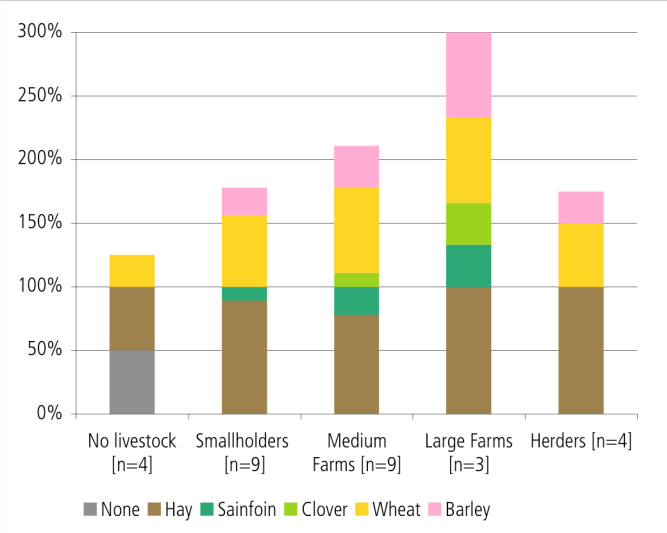


Figure 9.1 Land cultivation patterns by household groups, Jergetal 2007 (own data, based on qualitative interviews, autumn 2007)

Reading example: all three large farm households examined in Jergetal use their arable land to cultivate hay; each one (33%) additionally grows sainfoin or clover; each two (66%) additionally grow wheat and/or barley.

Cultivation patterns in Kyzyl-Tuu are rather monotonous by contrast (Figure 9.2). Nearly all households, whether wealthy or not, use their arable land exclusively as hay meadows, while only a few mid-sized and large farms can additionally cultivate barley, which is mostly used as nutrient-rich fodder supply.

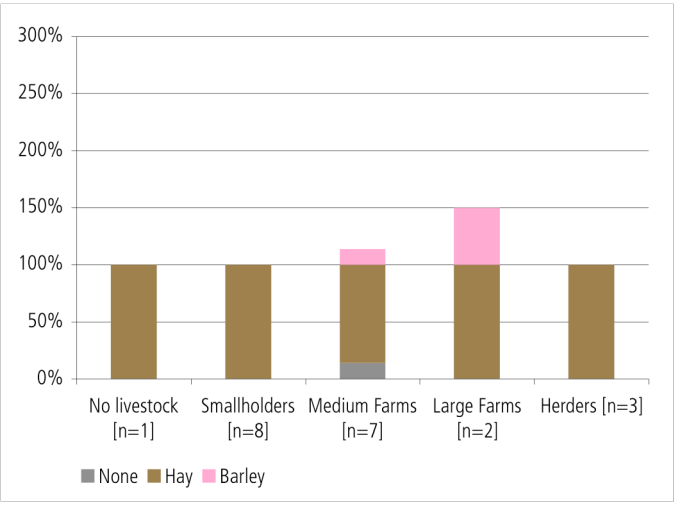


Figure 9.2 Land cultivation patterns by household groups, Kyzyl-Tuu 2007 (own data, based on qualitative interviews, autumn 2007)

As the subsequent sections will show, the considerable disparities between the two villages regarding cultivation are not only due to differences in altitude and growing period. Similarly, the disparities at household level between the asset-poor and the asset-rich are caused by many different factors including access to and transfer of arable land is central.

9.2 Access to and transfer of arable land

Since the breakdown of common land management under socialist rule and the distribution of legal property rights in the mid-1990s, responsibility for organizing and securing physical access to the arable land has been delegated to households and individuals. Consequently, not all farming households use their private land shares in the same way.

9.2.1 Scattered, small land plots hinder access to land

The lack of arable land is a general problem in Kyrgyzstan. Mainly due to its rugged topography, the country has the second lowest percentage of arable land among all Central Asian Republics (Jones 2003, 262). Of Kyrgyzstan's total land area of 200,00 km^2, only 7% (14,000 km^2) are arable; of this, 76% (10,700 km^2) are irrigated (Bloch et al. 1996; Giovarelli 1998). However, there are considerable regional disparities. More than two-thirds of all arable land is located in the north of the country, where less than half of the population live, so that there is a particular shortage of land in the south[101] (Peyrouse 2009). Yet as the situation in the two case study villages shows, there are also considerable disparities within oblasts and *rayons*.

Figure 9.3 Home gardens and arable land at the southern end of Jergetal village. In this place, the fields are large compared to other parts of the village (compare with Map 7.1; photo by the author, September 2007).

In Jergetal, every individual received 0.27 ha of irrigated arable land in 1994 (compare chapter 7). This is hardly sufficient to make a living from farming alone. In addition, the different parcels a household received are often spread over large distances. Sometimes, even individual shares were subdivided into several smaller parcels in different sites, so it is not uncommon to find tiny plots of less than 0.1 ha (compare Map 7.1).[102] As a consequence, many households cannot efficiently cultivate their arable land, since the input costs are often high (see 9.3) and this renders the cultivation of tiny, widespread land parcels virtually useless. As a result, only a few households – mostly mid-sized and large farm households – actively cultivate all the arable land they own. The majority of them only use one or two parcels and cut grass on the remaining land, if at all. Some have also begun to lease out their abandoned fields to others, while so far there have hardly been any land sales (see below).

> "In one place we have only seven *sotik* [0.07 ha] of land. It would be good if the land was in one place, not scattered. It is very difficult to farm now (…) There is one hectare of land which is located in one place. I only use this land, not the remaining land. It is not possible to cultivate anything on five *sotik* [0.05 ha]." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2f3]

In Kyzyl-Tuu, the problem of land shortage is less evident. On the one hand, people profited from a better land-man ratio than in Jergetal and therefore received more arable land per capita in the early 1990s (0.8 ha/capita; see chapter 7). On the other

[101] Naryn oblast is usually seen as part of Kyrgyzstan's 'North', together with Chui, Talas, and Issyk-Kul oblast, plus the capital city of Bishkek. The 'South' includes the three oblasts Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken.

[102] With the help of Landsat satellite images, Eriksson (2006, 27) illustrates the partitioning of arable land in Jergetal between 1993 and 2001 very well.

hand, most arable land in Kyzyl-Tuu is located close to the village (Map 9.1), so the land allotments per household are less scattered than in Jergetal. Most households received their land in one or two parts. In addition, the average distance from the settlement to the fields is not as large as in Jergetal. Thus, the main problem regarding land cultivation in Kyzyl-Tuu is the lack of sufficient water and of a functioning irrigation system (see 9.3.1) rather than the size and location of the fields.

One problem apparent in both villages is that fields close to the village often suffer from trespassing animals. It is especially cows staying in and around the village over the summer that often enter the cultivated fields and damage the crops or eat grass destined for winter fodder.

> "One of our land parcels is located in *Aral*, where we planted grass about four years ago. But we could not harvest, because the animals from the village ate all the grass before we came back from the mountains. *Aral* is not far from the village." (Herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [4a39b]

People who cannot afford to guard their fields themselves during the summer – such as the herder quoted above – encounter this type of problems most often. In another case in Kyzyl-Tuu, several neighboring households offered to their *ayil okmotu* to exchange their fields close to their houses for other land parcels far from the village, since they had suffered heavy losses due to repeated trespassing. Surprisingly, most people fence their home gardens but not their fields. When asked why he did not fence his land, a wealthy farmer in Kyzyl-Tuu replied that he tried to, but gave up after his wire was repeatedly stolen.

9.2.2 Transfer of arable land within and between households

Land inheritance and resource pooling within households

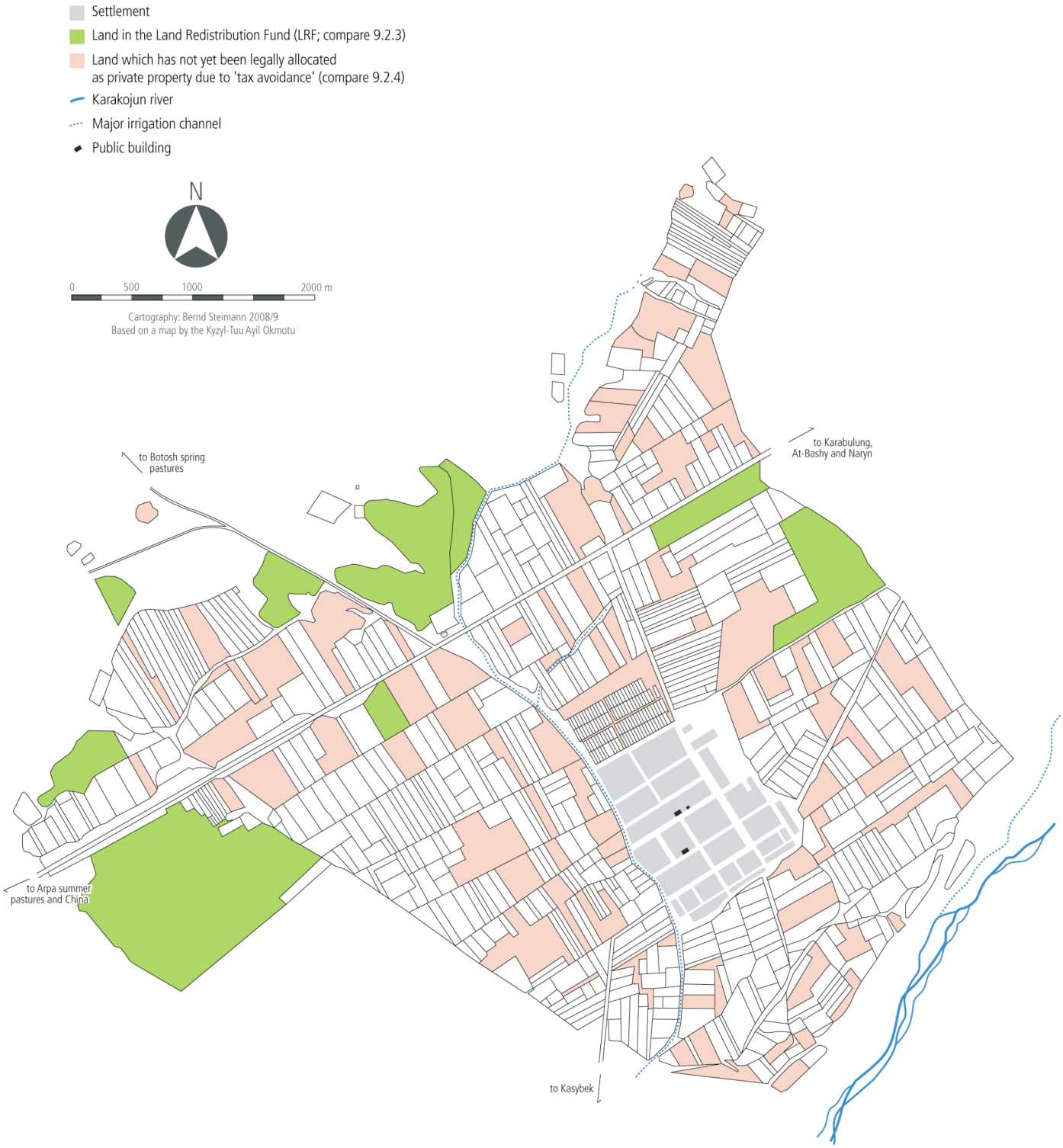
The practice of land inheritance further reduces households' land holdings in both villages. While land ownership certificates were issued per household (see 4.3.2), the Kyrgyz legislation since 2001 provides for every person's right to claim the value of his/her individual land share, though not to demarcate or partition it (Bruce et al. 2006, 73ff). Local inheritance practices, however, often follow customary law, which foresees no compensation but requires that the youngest son inherit the house as well as all the land so he can take care of his old parents. While Bruce et al. (2006) note that the written inheritance law was not followed in any of their Kyrgyz study villages, the land inheritance practices in Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu appear somewhat blurred between written and customary law.

Several respondents reported that they had divided a considerable part of their arable land among their sons once they got married, but retained their own (parental) shares as well as the shares of their unmarried children and their married daughters. This is possible because, by customary law, women are not seen as owners of the land, although the Kyrgyz legislation entitles them to an individual share too. Thus, women hardly ever receive their land share or a financial compensation when they leave their parents' house or when they divorce from their husband (Lindberg 2007, 59f).

> "My children weren't yet married when the land was distributed to us. But today they are married, and we have to return their piece of land to them. (…) They need their land if they want to live independently, so I gave them their share. (…) Every person received 0.27 ha and you can't do a lot with such an amount of land… So we have a problem…" (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [3a3]

Map 9.1

Kyzyl-Tuu Village
Arable land



However, the division of land property within a household does not necessarily mean that everybody begins farming his land on his own. In many cases, parents and their married sons continue to cultivate the parents' land share jointly, while the sons take care of their (usually smaller) personal share themselves.

> "I have distributed it [my land]. They [my sons] all live in the village, and three of them got married. I have given two hectares to each of them, and eight hectares belong to everybody. The sons who live here work together, and the sons who are students also come and help." (Large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a7]

As elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan (cf. Thieme 2008b; Schoch 2008), many young people from Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu migrate to Bishkek, Kazakhstan or Russia to look for employment or to study. Some of these migrants do not return to the village, but establish their own family in urban areas. However, since migrants cannot take along their individual land shares, all arable land remains with their parents and their youngest brother, who then hold it in trust and farm the household's land shares. If the latter are not too scattered, this form of resource pooling (or rather holding resources together) allows for more efficient land use (Schoch et al., forthcoming).

> "Almost all [my brothers] are in the city, so I have all the land and the livestock. (…). They left home." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b14]

Despite these local practices of inheritance and the effects of migration, the problem of diminishing land assets and increased land shortage remains. Besides daughters-in law who join their husband's household without bringing along their legally owing land share, children born after 1994 further exacerbate the shortage of land at household level. Thus, many households must care for additional people without any provision of additional land, so that pressure on land remains high – a problem which, with the exception of Kazakhstan, exists in all rural areas of Central Asia (Bruce et al. 2006, 74; Peyrouse 2009, 5).

According to the land planning specialists of both *ayil okmotus*, there is no way of privatizing arable land from the Land Redistribution Fund (LRF), which is exclusively for lease (see 9.2.3). The only private land that young families can apply for to their community is a small plot to build a house and lay out a home garden[103]. Thus, the only way to cope with land shortage is to either lease additional arable land from the LRF or to lease or purchase land from other people.

Sale, purchase and lease of arable land between households

In 1999, the private use rights over arable land given to people in the mid-1990s was finally converted into constitutionally secured ownership rights. In 2001, also the moratorium on land sales was lifted, so that arable land became a legally secured and fully transferable asset (compare chapter 4). Nevertheless, sales of private land shares are still close to zero in both villages. Actually, only one smallholder from Kyzyl-Tuu said he had bought arable land from someone else: 2.4 ha from people who migrated to Bishkek, plus 1.2 ha from neighbors who did not use their land, at an average price of 7,000 KGS (US $170) per hectare. Apart from that, all land transfers between households are lease agreements. In nearly all cases, the lessees and lessors are either smallholders or households without livestock[104]. Lease agreements are usually concluded on an annual basis and for comparatively small pieces of land (up to 1.5 ha). Lessors are usually paid in cash according to the quality and location of the field. Fees vary between 500 and 2,000 KGS (US $12 to 48) per hectare and year. Sharecropping or in-kind compensation is not common. All land transfers between households are concluded according to *kyrgyz'cha* [Kyrg. for 'the Kyrygz way']. People often use the term *kyrgyz'cha* to describe practices that help to solve a difficult

[103] Personal communication with land planning specialists, Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu A/O, 23 and 25 Oct 2007; 22 Nov 2007.
[104] The only exception is one medium farmer from Kyzyl-Tuu who rents out 3 ha to relatives.

situation in a confident, often informal – though not necessarily illegal – way. In the case of land transfers, this means that agreements are concluded by handshake, without contract or registration with the *ayil okmotu* or the regional branch of GosRegistr.

Yet such agreements are still few. Many of the land parcels available for rent are economically unattractive, since they are often small and widely scattered. One respondent from Jergetal also estimated that only 20% of the households unable to cultivate their land would be ready to lease out to others, while another wealthy farmer complained about the general unwillingness of small farmers to rent out their land. This confirms the findings of Childress et al (2003, 6f), which state that the majority of all small, asset-poor farms continue farming despite their relative inefficiency, and would not be ready to give away their land holdings. It seems however that many turn away from crop cultivation, using their land as hay meadows instead (see 9.5 below). In Kyzyl-Tuu, only one respondent rented 3 hectares of land – from his brother-in-law. All other respondents said that it was no use renting additional land, since the irrigation problem would be the same everywhere.

9.2.3 Transfer of arable land between the state and households

In general, there are two forms of land reserves within an *ayil okmotu*: the 'Land Redistribution Fund' (LRF), and so-called 're-cultivation land'. Evidence from the two case study villages indicates that the strategies of private and public actors to access and allocate land from these two pools often maneuver between the formal and the informal.

Land lease from the 'Land Redistribution Fund (LRF)'

Land Redistribution Funds were created in the course of the early agrarian reform policies. Today, they serve as land reserve funds at communal level, in which about 25% of all arable land of the former kolkhoz is set aside for special purposes (see 4.3.3 for details). Above all, LRFs are intended to generate revenues for the *ayil okmotu*. The communal authorities can lease out LRF land to private farmers and enterprises. *De jure*, land parcels applied for must be publicly announced for open auction and allotted to the highest bidder. Auctions have to be carried out by a special LRF commission consisting of representatives from the *rayon* GosRegistr, the head of *ayil okmotu*, members of the *ayil kengesh* (communal council), the *ayil bas'chys* (village heads), and the communal land-use specialist, plus some ordinary citizens. As a matter of fact, LRF revenues constitute a considerable share of the communal budget in regions with a lot of productive land, i.e. Chui and Issyk-Kul *oblast*. In Naryn *oblast*, however, where arable land is often scarce and of poor quality, local governments earn less though the LRF (Childress et al. 2003, 29). In addition, young families and newcomers are entitled to a small share of private land from the LRF to build a house and lay out a home garden, though not to private shares of arable land. *De jure*, communal authorities also have the possibility to support low-income households with LRF land and to right any potential wrongs of the initial distribution of arable land (Kadyrkulov and Kalchayev 2000, 158; Childress et al. 2003, 21ff).

The Jergetal LRF contains 574 ha of arable land, of which 59% were rented out in autumn 2007. Although all LRF land is irrigated, it is fairly unattractive to asset-poor households, since most of it is located very far from the village near Baskyia, Orus-Bulak and Emgek-Talaa (see Map 7.1). This makes cultivation very cost-intensive. It is therefore hardly surprising that, with the exception of one smallholder, only mid-sized and large farmers are currently leasing LRF land. All of them lease comparatively large pieces of arable land ranging from 5 to 20 ha. According to the communal land-use specialist, 5-year lease contracts are awarded to the highest bidder in a publicly announced auction at a minimal annual price of 500 KGS/ha (US $12). He also said

that the *ayil okmotu* would not give away LRF land to poor families for free[105]. However, numerous other respondents asserted that they had never heard about any public auction and that lease contracts were probably agreed upon in secret. Two other, comparatively wealthy respondents also complained that the *ayil okmotu's* management of the LRF was anything but efficient, and that the community would lose a lot of revenues that way.

The Karakojun LRF contains 906 ha of land, of which 50% were rented out in autumn 2007 (Table 9.3). Like all arable land in Kyzyl-Tuu, the LRF parcels are not too far from the village (see Map 9.1). Lease durations depend on the type of land; since communal officials interpret them as maximum rather than fixed terms, LRF land can also be leased for just one year. The thus far moderate demand for LRF land resulted in only two public auctions, each one in 2000 and 2003. Thus, most LRF land is currently leased out at the minimal price. This and the fact that most LRF land is not too far from the village may explain why more asset-poor households use LRF land in Kyzyl-Tuu than in Jergetal.

Table 9.3 Structure of the Land Redistribution Fund, Karakojun *ayil okmotu* (Karakojun *ayil okmotu* 2007)

	Irrigated land	Rain-fed land	Hay meadows
Total land [ha]	356	99	451
Minimal annual rental fee[a] [KGS (US$)]	406 (9.8)	123 (3.0)	83 (2.0)
Maximal lease duration	5 yrs	10 yrs	10 yrs
Leased out [ha (%)]	156 (43%)	99 (100%)	200 (44%)
Number of lessees	41	18	35
Average lease area [ha]	3.8	5.5	5.5
Minimum / maximum leased out [ha]	1.2 / 25	1 / 18	1.5 / 30

[a] *including land and social fund taxes*

However, according to the communal land-use specialist, the productivity of many private land plots is decreasing, either because people irrigate them improperly, or because of the absence of crop rotation. Apparently, this has led to increased demand for arable land, so that the area of leased LRF land increased from only 90 ha in 2000 to 455 ha in 2007. Therefore, the Karakojun *ayil okmotu* budgeted a total income 52,837 KGS (US $1,275) from LRF fees and taxes, plus 39,553 KGS (US $955) of LRF-related social fund taxes for 2007[106].

Informal acquisition of 're-cultivation land'

Besides the LRF, both *ayil okmotus* own additional, so-called 're-cultivation land'. Since it is rain-fed, this land needs massive re-cultivation work including the construction of irrigation channels before it can be used for crop cultivation. In Kyzyl-Tuu, where access to LRF land is comparably easy, nobody is currently using re-cultivation land. In Jergetal, however, re-cultivation land is an alternative to the remote LRF land – but only for those who can afford to invest time and money in re-cultivation work. Among all households visited in Jergetal, only mid-sized farms were involved in the use of re-cultivation land. By doing so, several households profit from an exceptionally weak communal control over re-cultivation land by just acquiring it without any formal agreement. Two different respondents told me how they began to dig channels on apparently 'unused' land. After a couple of years, when the channels were ready and cultivation began, they formalized their claim with the communal land use specialist by concluding a formal lease contract.

[105] Personal communication, 23 Oct 2007.
[106] All figures according to personal communication with the Kyzyl-Tuu A/O land use specialist, 22 November 2007.

> "I did not tell the *ayil okmotu*, I had no agreement with them. Later on I went to the *ayil okmotu*, when I already had cultivated the land. So they said that I can rent in this land. We made a one-and-a-half meter wide canal by hand." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1b9]

Asked why we had chosen this specific piece of land, the same farmer replied that he had been responsible for irrigating it in Soviet times. Therefore, people would approve his recent claim because they remembered what a good kolkhoz worker he was. The farmer thus legitimized his claim to arable land by referring to his professional performance and his reputation as a good proletarian in the socialist economy. According to an assistant at the Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, such retroactive formalization of land claims by *kyrgyz'cha* is the rule rather than the exception, even though it is informal (see 9.2.2 above).

9.2.4 Direct and indirect taxation of arable land

Although the land taxation system is not an integral part of land markets, a basic understanding of the fees and charges estates are burdened with may help to understand some peoples' practices regarding owned and leased land. Tax avoidance, for instance, may be one reason for the informal acquisition of re-cultivation land and for the short-term lease agreements among households.

Land-related taxes

Irrespective of whether they use all their arable land or not, households are obliged to pay land taxes to their *ayil okmotu* (Table 9.4). In Jergetal, the total annual tax for irrigated land is 98 KGS/ha (as per 2007; US $2.4), plus a lump sum for communal pastures[107]. In Kyzyl-Tuu, the annual tax for irrigated land is 95 KGS/ha (as per 2007; US $2.3), including a lump sum of 17 KGS (US $0.4) for communal pastures. These taxes also apply to LRF land, which is another reason why many cannot afford to rent land from the fund.

> "If you rent in ten hectares of land, you have to pay taxes to the *ayil okmotu*. You need money to cultivate." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [1a10]

There is also an annual tax of 4 KGS (US $0.1) per 0.01 ha on home gardens. It may seem surprising that the lump sum for pastures is thus connected to a household's arable land estate and not to the number of animals or the amount of pastures in use. Needless to say, many respondents complained about this taxation system (see also 10.3.3). In addition, arable land also serves as a calculation basis for taxes to the state social pension fund ('SozFond'; old age, disability and survivors), since only few people in the rural area have a taxable regular income.

Table 9.4 Land tax system, Karakojun *ayil okmotu* (Karakojun *ayil okmotu* 2007)

	Irrigated land	Rain-fed land	Hay meadows
Annual land tax per hectare [KGS (US$)]	95 (2.3)	27 (0.7)	14 (0.3)
Annual Social Fund tax per hectare [KGS (US$)]	191 (4.6)	54.3 (13.1)	21.7 (5.2)
Total annual tax per hectare [KGS (US$)]	**286 (6.9)**	**81.3 (19.6)**	**35.7 (8.6)**

[107] The pasture tax remained a true mystery throughout my research in Jergetal. To my surprise, none of the various land-use specialists that took over from each other at the A/O were able to explain how pasture taxes were calculated.

Private land as a basis for calculating child allowances

Besides direct taxation, arable land also serves as a basis for calculating a household's entitlement to state child allowances (compare Box 4b). According to the 2007 rules, a household is entitled to child allowances if its monthly per capita income is below the guaranteed minimum standard of living of 175.01 KGS (US $4.2). For the calculation of incomes, the social inspector of the *ayil okmotu* considers not only a household's livestock and regular cash incomes if available at all, but also its land holdings, including the *ogorod*. For every hectare of arable land – whether it is in use or not – a monthly per capita income of 55.90 KGS (US $1.4) is assumed (for the *ogorod* it is 3.5 KGS/month/0.01 ha)[108].

Thus, many rural households are taxed and assessed on the basis of land assets that many of them are unable to use. However, not all households actually pay the land taxes they would have to. The cadastral map of Kyzyl-Tuu village (Map 9.1) shows that land taxes have not yet been paid for an estimated 35% of all land parcels (similar figures for Jergetal were not available at the time of research). As a consequence, the regional land registration office has not yet issued legal ownership certificates to the respective households. This not only results in a considerable loss of revenue for the communal budget, but also in a lack of legal security for those cultivating the land.

9.3 Access to other production factors: water, machines, labor, and cash

Land shortage is not the only reason that cultivation is hardly ever profitable in the two case study villages. Besides the limited availability of arable land, other crucial assets such as water for irrigation, machinery for seeding and harvesting, sufficient labor and other inputs such as seeds and fertilizers are often difficult to come by. Last but not least, many people also struggle because of their lack of knowledge and experience of proper land cultivation.

9.3.1 Irrigation: ecological and institutional constraints

Due to the highly continental climate and the resulting little annual precipitation in Central Kyrgyzstan (see 4.1), agriculture in Naryn *oblast* is highly dependent on irrigation. However, ecological and institutional factors make irrigation a difficult and often contentious issue.

General lack of precipitation

From an ecological point of view, sufficient snow in winter and rain in spring are crucial for the supply with water for irrigation during the sowing and cultivation period. This became especially clear after 2004, when three consecutive years with unusually dry winters and extraordinarily warm summers caused a dramatic decline in yields, as many farmers in both villages reported.

> "Nobody from the whole village could make fodder this year, because of the dry climate and the lack of water. We could cultivate more fodder if there was snow or rain. They could not even cultivate fodder on the irrigated land this year. (…) We have to pay attention to the snow. It depends on the snow – there's no use in having clean channels but no snow,." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2c23]

[108] Personal communication with the social inspectors at the Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu A/O, 17 and 22 May 2007.

This situation lasted until 2009, when sustained rainfall in spring and summer finally resulted in a good harvest again. Yet water shortage is likely to increase in future, since average temperatures in Northern Kyrgyzstan have constantly been on the rise over the last 130 years (Bolch 2007; UN 2008).

From open access to new institutional arrangements

However, sufficient precipitation alone does not guarantee sustainable irrigation. The sophisticated, but often technically intensive systems of irrigation channels, ditches, dams and locks constructed in socialist times received very little maintenance from the very beginning. Thus , a considerable part of the irrigation infrastructure was already in bad shape by the end of the 1980s, not only in Naryn *oblast*, but in Central Asia as a whole (Obertreis 2006; Larue 2008). In the two villages, many of the large concrete channels were broken or carried away after the dissolution of the kolkhozes, while the small ditches between the fields were often blocked or overgrown. Together with the fact that there were no kolkhoz *murabs* (water managers) anymore to plan and execute common irrigation, this led to a decade of privately executed, often poorly coordinated and inefficient irrigation after 1994. In both villages, most people started to divert the water to irrigate their own fields, only occasionally seeking the help of a *murab* in return for direct payment, which was subject to bilateral negotiations. As a result, there was no common investment in infrastructure maintenance for many years.

In the early noughties, the World Bank addressed the problem by introducing participatory local water management through the concept of Water Users' Associations (WUA; Lindberg 2007; Larue 2008). Kyzyl-Tuu officially registered its WUA in 2002, Jergetal in 2003. Since then, people are formally obliged to pay a fixed per hectare fee to the association, after which an official WUA *murab* allocates the water to their field during a defined time slot (see Box 9a for detailed procedure and fees). People then still have the choice of doing the irrigation themselves or hiring an independent *murab* (usually a former kolkhoz *murab*). Those who can spare the time and workforce usually prefer to irrigate themselves, since professional water managers charge up to 200 KGS (US $5) per hectare. Nevertheless, irrigation is hard work and requires a lot of experience, as a female farmer from Kyzyl-Tuu recounts:

> "Before, I was asking someone else, and I paid 1,600 *Som*. But they did not irrigate well; I was not satisfied. So I had to irrigate myself. (…) After this I got very sick and I had backache. The first year was very difficult; the second year I went with my son, but (…) I was the only lady there, so I did not help them to divide the water. (…) This year my sons went there and they irrigated the land. It was great that this year we got [our time slot] in the daytime. This time we were experienced and prepared." (Teacher, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

Many however criticize that the overhaul of the channels and dams, which began in both villages a few years ago, has not yet been completed. Although the Jergetal WUA has constantly raised the irrigation fees in recent years in order to pay the local contribution towards the construction work (compare Box 9a), many channels are still in a bad shape, and not everybody can irrigate their fields sufficiently and on time. The general dissatisfaction about the irrigation issue was also expressed at a meeting of local residents with their new *rayon akym* on 13 November 2007.

> "Almost nobody cultivated wheat this year, not even the wealthy people, because there's no water. They have been repairing the channels for the last two years, but have not finished yet, so it is difficult for the people. We could irrigate neither the fields nor the kitchen garden." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [1c34]

Also in Kyzyl-Tuu, the head of *ayil okmotu* named irrigation the most important problem in 2007, "because if we had water, many problems would be solved: we could harvest well and we could make more hay and vegetables."

Box 9a Water Users' Associations in Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu

In 1999, the Kyrgyz government embarked upon a World Bank-initiated irrigation sector reform that consisted of a "complete devolution and transfer of management, maintenance, and irrigation investment tasks from government institutions to community based farmer's organizations" (Larue 2008, 1). As a result, most Kyrgyz communities had to establish a local Water Users' Associations (WUA). Kyzyl-Tuu officially registered its WUA in 2002; Jergetal in 2003. Both associations have a director, an accountant, one hydro-engineer, and several *murabs* (water managers) who are each responsible for a defined quarter of the village. The selection procedure for the WUA office bearers is not uniform; some WUAs elect their staff in general meetings, while others divide the command in different sections of the village. The WUA director and the accountant receive a constant salary; the engineer is paid for eight months per year; the *murabs* from April to August. According to Ul Hassan et al. (2004), the organizational set-up of many WUAs is very hierarchical and resembles the structural model of the collective farm – which means that many WUA directors enjoy considerable discretionary power.

Irrigation fees and procedure Every WUA has a list of all member households and their land property. Those who want to irrigate their land must first pay a defined per hectare fee. They then receive a receipt against which a WUA *murab* will allocate water to their fields. The per hectare fee includes the salaries of the WUA staff as well as a contribution to infrastructure maintenance and reconstruction. The Jergetal WUA has constantly raised the fee over recent years, from 45 KGS/ha (US $1) in 2005 to 186 KGS/ha (US $4.5) in 2007. In Kyzyl-Tuu, the official fee is 50 KGS/ha (US $1.1) for land close to channels and 25 KGS/ha (US $0.5) for land far from channels, while every household must pay an additional 100 KGS/year (US $2.2) for the WUA's overheads and to maintain the channels (Näscher 2009, 63).

Improvement of the irrigation infrastructure In April 2006, the Jergetal WUA entered an agreement with ARIS[109] to rehabilitate the irrigation system. Costs for the credit are shared between the local population (25%) and the Kyrgyz Ministry of Agriculture (MAWRPI; 75%). For this, every household in Jergetal had to pay a single installment of 10 KGS/person (US $0.25), while the irrigation fee was raised, too (see above). With the same financing scheme, the Kyzyl-Tuu WUA has already completed a series of new reservoirs. A second step, including the cleaning of four kilometers of channels, began in 2007.[110]

Institutional weaknesses of participatory water management

The establishment of WUAs and the reconstruction of infrastructure have undoubtedly improved public coordination of irrigation and joint control over water resources. Some accounts, however, indicate that the established rules and procedures still leave some room for negotiation and sporadic misuse. Several respondents complained for instance that they received too little water for their money or that their time slot was too late in the year, rendering irrigation virtually useless. Since people must line up for water, delays or inconsistencies in the allocation of water can cause considerable losses for those who come last. In Jergetal, one farmer complained that others misused his time slot, so that he received less water than what he had paid for; another one assured that he still irrigates his fields without paying a single *Som* to anyone. In addition, the director of the Jergetal WUA said that those who pay their fees regularly and on time would be allowed to irrigate once for free – an apparently arbitrary rule that seems to conflict with the defined standards of WUAs. Näscher (2009, 63) reports for Kyzyl-Tuu that the *de facto* fees are anything but fixed, so that the defined time slots may be extended against additional payment. This may also explain the considerable variations regarding fees (50 to 130 KGS in Kyzyl-Tuu (US $1.2 to 3.1)) and time slots (five hours to two days in Jergetal) recorded during interviews. The fact that the *Aksakal*

[109] ARIS is the Kyrgyz Republic's Community Development and Investment Agency, co-financed by the World Bank and the Kyrgyz government.

[110] Personal communication with the director of the Jergetal WUA, 18 May 2007; and with the executive secretary of the Kyzyl-Tuu A/O, 22 May 2007.

court in Kyzyl-Tuu regularly deals with irrigation-related conflicts also indicates that the WUAs do not yet fulfill their intended role[111].

These accounts confirm the findings of various authors who have critically examined Water Users' Associations and irrigation practices in the Kyrgyz Republic in recent years (cf. Ul Hassan et al. 2004; Bichsel 2006; Lindberg 2007, Larue 2008). In her case study from Northern Kyrgyzstan, Lindberg (2007) depicts various methods of illicit water use and concludes that, irrespective of WUA rules and procedures, access to irrigation water is still governed by social status, wealth and personal connections. As a result, well-connected head-end users are often able to take considerably more water than tail-enders. However, as Larue (2008) shows, financial and social considerations, such as kinship ties or interventions by elders, often prevent WUA staff from effectively sanctioning offenders, which adds to the institutional weakness of many WUAs. Most authors therefore agree that the original intention of WUAs – i.e. to deal with equity problems regarding the allocation of water – was only partially successful so far.

9.3.2 Machinery: unequal prices and high transaction costs

With the dissolution of the kolkhozes, most machinery passed into private hands (see 7.3.4). Since then, many trucks, tractors and combines have been sold or have broken down, so that functioning machines have become much sought-after goods at the local level. Most households must bring in their hay at least once a year, while some also need a combine to harvest their wheat. Therefore, most of the few machine owners now rent out their services to non-owners against cash.

Non-owners must cope with high transaction costs

Prices are usually negotiable and often depend on the personal relation between owner and client. Especially kinship seems to play a decisive role. In Jergetal, Eriksson (2006) observed that non-relatives sometimes pay up to three times more than relatives. Depending on the distance of the field from the village, plowing or harvesting, one hectare costs between 1,000 to 1,300 KGS (as per 2007; US $24 to 31); and one tour to bring in hay 100 to 150 KGS (US $2.4 to 3.6). In addition, the fuel to run the machine must always be contributed by the clients themselves. This means considerable additional costs, which are not negotiable and difficult to calculate in advance. Between spring and autumn 2008, for instance, the diesel price in Naryn *oblast* rose by 50% from 26 to 39 KGS/l (US $0.7 to 1.1).

Thus, on the one hand, the small group of machine owners can now generate income by renting out technical services to others. While most of them just rent out an old tractor or truck they acquired from the former kolkhoz, one mid-sized farmer from Jergetal is actively tying to expand its machine pool to offer a whole range of technical services to customers. Non-owners, on the other hand, must often cope with high transaction costs related to the use of machines: they not only spend a lot of money on rent and fuel, but must also constantly (re)negotiate the terms of use with the owners.

> "There are more than ten tractors in the village, but they all are private, so you have to go to all of them. We prepare the money and the fuel, and then you have to get up very early. (…) The machinery is the problem. When I ask [the drivers] they say 'okay okay', but they do not always keep their promise." (Female smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

In Jergetal in particular, rental costs and high fuel prices have made it economically unattractive for many among the less wealthy to cultivate land parcels that are far from their home, the more so as many of these parcels are often small.

[111] Personal communication with the head of the Kyzyl-Tuu *Aksakal* court, 25 Nov 2007.

> "We used our land in Emgek-Talaa for one year only, for barley and wheat. After that, we estimated the expenses and realized that it's not profitable at all. (…) Only people with 500 to 600 sheep can use that land." (Herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [4a39b]

Attempts to (re-)establish a common property regime

In view of the shortage of functioning machines and the unequal rental prices, both *ayil okmotus* tried to re-establish a common property regime for machines, either by regaining control over machinery or by regulating the formation of prices. However, the undertaking failed in both cases. In Kyzyl-Tuu, the *ayil okmotu* decided to recollect all distributed machines a few years after privatization in order to establish a communal machine centre. But in view of the owners' resistance and rising fuel prices, the idea was soon dropped[112].

In Jergetal, the *ayil okmotu* retained a few kolkhoz machines to rent them out to private farmers. However, since most of these machines were old and in urgent need of repair, this central scheme soon ceased to exist. In a second attempt, the *ayil okmotu* then issued an official price list for technical services. By 2007, the price for harvesting one hectare was thus fixed at 1,000 KGS (US $24). In addition, technical services were subject to 4% local tax. According to a local machine owner, however, most drivers ignored both price list and taxes, agreeing instead on prices among themselves. Finally, in 2008, nine machine owners from Jergetal decided to form a cooperative. In order to win over new customers, they sought to reduce the apparent price insecurity by abiding by the communal tariffs and by paying the 4% local tax to the *ayil okmotu*. In return, the *ayil okmotu* started to provide them with fuel at reduced rates[113]. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent such local initiatives can actually help to lower transaction costs for the general public in the long term.

9.3.3 Labor: social, human and financial capital governs access to workforce

The transformation from large-scale kolkhoz production systems to small farm units at the household level led to a rapid de-mechanization of the Kyrgyz agrarian sector. The breakdown or sale of machines and other technical infrastructure as well as rising fuel prices have fostered the demand for human workforce (Peyrouse 2009).

Pooling of labor within households and families

In times of lasting rural underemployment, most of the workforce is recruited within the household and the family. Since many people have no regular paid job, they can invest a lot of time into their own farm, so that in nearly all households, two to three generations participate in joint farming activities. Male adults who left their parents' house but still live in the same village often continue to cooperate with their parents (compare 9.2.2). Migrants who have the possibility to do so usually return to the village during labor-intensive times to support their family, i.e. for harvesting crops and hay, but also for lambing and shearing. Otherwise, their absence can often be compensated for with the help of their remittances, which are sometimes used to hire additional labor (see below).

> "During the hay harvest my sons also come and help – when they have time. If they have no time, they send money." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a16]

Schoch et al. (forthcoming) report similar practice for Southern Kyrgyzstan. In general, large families can thus rely on a larger potential workforce and can often afford to cultivate more land and/or more labor-intensive crops such as wheat or barley. By

[112] Personal communication with the head of Kyzyl-Tuu A/O, 7 Dec 2007.
[113] Personal communication with cooperative leader, 30 Aug 2008.

contrast, those with little of their own workforce are often restricted to cultivating small pieces of land and to less labor-intensive crops.

> "My children are small and I cannot cultivate barley and wheat. I make hay (…) When my husband was still alive, we grew barley. I do not remember exactly, but I think on more than 2 ha of land – and on 1 ha [we had] wheat. (…) I spend two months for harvesting the hay from these 4 ha of land. Can you imagine? So now it's getting very difficult. (…) For the last two years I have been doing this work together with my three children." (Teacher, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

In a similar way, many herders and their families who spend the summer far from the village hardly ever have the capacity to take care of their arable land. Since most of them cannot afford to buy all the fodder they need, herders often ask relatives or friends to look after their fields, herding their animals for free in return.

Hiring labor through *ashar*

Another way of mobilizing human workforce beyond the own household is through *ashar*. Especially less wealthy neighbors and relatives engage in this inherited practice of voluntary pooling of labor based on reciprocity to assist each other with various tasks. Although *ashar* is mainly practised for construction work, people also revert to it for irrigation, during harvest or for shearing sheep. The term *ashar* denotes two different, yet related practices of mutual assistance without monetary reward. It exists throughout Central Asia and other parts of the Muslim world as *hashar* in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, *assar* in Kazakhstan, or *asher* in Pakistan (Babajanian et al. 2005; Bichsel 2006; Nikonova et al. 2007; Shahbaz 2009). On the one hand, *ashar* is practised among relatives and neighbors as a voluntary pooling of labor to help each other in the construction of a house, the preparation of a funeral or in labor-intensive fieldwork. This type of *ashar* works on a reciprocal basis. On the other hand, *ashar* also refers to joint labor at communal level, such as cleaning irrigation channels or carrying out other infrastructure maintenance. In this case, every tribe [Kyrg. *uruu*] has to provide a certain number of workers according to its size; these are usually mobilized by elders [Kyrg. *aksakals*] or tribe leaders [Kyrg. *uruu bas'chys*].

Ashar is based on a set of rules and norms of the Kyrgyz religious and customary law [Kyrg. *adat*]. *Adat* is a system of social control built around respect towards parents, elders and ancestors. It is also the basis for the important role of *aksakals* in decision-making at the local level. One of the basic principles of *adat* is *tooganchilik* – the obligation of each individual to help his community members (Temirkoulov 2004, 96). On the one hand, the principle has been internalized in the everyday solidarity between relatives and kin, while on the other hand it finds an obvious expression in the two forms of *ashar*, which thus "cannot be seen outside other forms of reciprocity and mutual aid" (Bichsel 2006, 113). *Adat* also requires that those who refuse to participate in *ashar* be sanctioned and punished by the society through censure and shame [Kyrg. *uiat*]. *Aksakals* usually play a key role in both mobilizing people and sanctioning wrongdoers.

The socialist authorities actively integrated the concept of *ashar* into the Soviet system. In the early years of the Soviet Union, regional authorities often manipulated *ashar* to mobilize the population for the (forced) construction of roads or irrigation systems. Later on, it was mainly used to maintain kolkhoz infrastructure and for other unpaid work at communal level. The latter practice is usually referred to as *subbotnik* [derived from the Russian work for Saturday, *subbota*], and still exists today, e.g. in the form of schoolchildren cleaning streets and parks (Koehler and Zürcher 2004; Bichsel 2006). Under the Akaev government, the role of *aksakals* and thus of *ashar* has been strengthened and institutionalized as part of the state's decentralization strategy. Today, many donor organizations make use of *ashar* as a legitimate form of 'traditional' institution to implement their development goals at local level. This has raised some concerns over the reproduction of unequal local power relations between

dominant *aksakal* leaders and more marginalized social groups (cf. Babajanian 2005; Bichsel 2006; Lindberg 2007). Nevertheless, findings from Uzbekistan (Rasanayagam 2002) indicate that people spend less and less time to *ashar* and that only those who maintain close social relations still support each other in this way. In Southern Kyrgyzstan, however, Schoch (2008, 76f) has observed that *ashar* has grown in importance, because it can help to compensate for the lack of workforce that results from the absence of a large part of the male working population.

Hiring labor against payment

Wealthier farmers often prefer to hire additional labor in return for payment rather than calling relatives for *ashar*. They mostly recruit less wealthy non-relatives from within the village who are looking for seasonal wage employment; the employment of close relatives is usually frowned upon. Such practices are also common in other rural areas in Kyrgyzstan (cf. Lindberg 2007; Shigaeva et al. 2007). In Jergetal, the price for the manual cutting of one hectare of hay or sainfoin was around 1,500 KGS (US $40) by 2007.

> "Sometimes we pay people to irrigate our fields and cut the hay. (…) I am old, I am not strong enough. My children [grand-children] are too young. My sons sometimes help to make hay bales, or in other ways… But they have their own families." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [3a3]

Hiring paid laborers also prevents the employer from having *ashar* obligation to reciprocate. According to a young, large farmer from Kyzyl-Tuu who regularly hires friends and former classmates, taking on paid day laborers has become more popular in recent years because people are increasingly unwilling to work for free. This is confirmed by the experience of a widowed smallholder who tried to call in her relatives for help during the hay harvest: "Everybody promises to help, but they don't always do it." When it comes to communal *ashar*, the same wealthy farmer prefers not to participate. Instead, he offers money or vodka to those who have also been selected by the tribe leader [Kyrg. *uruu bas'chy*] "(…) so that they work for one person more". Apparently, this is enough to avoid *uiat*, i.e. sanctions by the community. Such practice confirms what Kuehnast and Dudwick (2004) have observed, i.e. that wealthier rural Kyrgyz households are increasingly able to use cash to supplement or even substitute for social capital in the form of (reciprocal) relations with kin and neighbors.

"Today, everybody works on his own": from failed cooperation towards paid labor

People's varying practices to pool and mobilize workforce thus provide a good example of the current state of cooperation at local level. In general, people cooperate within the boundaries of their own household and with close relatives. Beyond that however, mutual help and assistance have diminished and often given way to indifference and mistrust.

> "In the past, they [neighbors] supported each other, but now we cannot even ask for bread. (…) Every family is individual now, and not everything is sufficient. There are feasts and other things, and that's why people can't support each other. (…) Everybody takes care of his own business, and all are becoming selfish these days – especially the rich people." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [2d7]

Most respondents from all sorts of households share an impression that people increasingly abstain from common work: "Today, everybody works on his own" is an often-heard statement nowadays. However, what at first sight seems to be an exemplary internalization of neoliberal principles is more often the result of personal experiences during the mid-1990s. At that time, many people got involved in small-scale cooperation. Within their neighborhood or *uruu* they tried to farm the fields they had received jointly and which often lay side by side. Sooner or later, however, mistrust grew and most of these experiments failed.

> "At the beginning [after the distribution], we tried to work together within the tribe. (…) For one or two years we worked jointly, we prepared fodder for the barns. So we tried to work, but we had disagreements. Some worked more, some worked less, [and] there were lazy people who did not work at all. So we all decided to stop it and started to work individually." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [4a29]

Today, most respondents show little interest in working with others again. On the one hand, many think that the large wealth disparities between households make it impossible to become partners again. On the other hand, wealthier farmers in particular have lost interest in cooperating with others, since their financial resources usually allow them to compensate for the lack of workforce or other inputs. Today, one of the few forms of more formalized cooperation beyond the household level exists is agricultural group credits, a concept which has proven at least partially successful in Jergetal (see 9.3.4 below). By contrast, a recent state program to promote cooperation in rural areas yielded little result, but rather increased people's skepticism, as the example of Kyzyl-Tuu shows (Box 9b).

> "There is no cooperation between the families. The government says that there should be cooperation, but nobody is working jointly." (Smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2a10]

As a consequence, labor-related relationships between people have increasingly taken on a monetary form. In order to make a living, many asset-poor people now work for their wealthy neighbors for cash.

> "These [poor] people work for others to survive. (…) Those who keep livestock, like Myrzabek [his neighbor] or me, do not suffer. But these poor people are having a difficult time, they must work like slaves." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a29]

Such dependencies between the asset-poor and the asset-rich are more pronounced in the non-farm sector, where many of the asset-poor make a living from casual or seasonal construction work, rather than in the farm sector. The comparison with slavery may be exaggerated. Although wealthy farmers usually hire the same workers repeatedly, there is – with the exception of long-term relationships in animal husbandry (see 10.2.3) – no indication of exploitation or sustained economic dependency between employees and employers.

Box 9b "20,000 *Som* is what a rich man spends on lunch": failed state attempts to promote cooperation in Kyzyl-Tuu

In the mid-noughties, the Kyrgyz government began to regard cooperatives as the panacea for rural development and started a nation-wide program for the promotion of agrarian cooperatives in rural areas. In 2006, *rayon* representatives called on people in Kyzyl-Tuu to organize themselves in groups, write their own business plans and apply for group loans. However, the initial euphoria quickly ebbed away when the loans provided were much smaller than promised, and the announced backstopping never substantiated. A farmer who participated in the program recounts:

> "At that time, the then head of *ayil okmotu* informed us about the possibility of forming cooperatives and create new jobs. They defined three topical directions in which we should work: land cultivation, animal husbandry, and social issues. For each of these issues, we were to establish one cooperative, each made up of ten young families, write a business plan and then receive an interest-free loan and professional support from specialists. At least that's what a representative from the *rayon* administration promised us. So we joined the animal husbandry cooperative, although we didn't really know the other nine families – they were neither our relatives nor our neighbors. First we agreed on a name for our cooperative – *Asyk* [Kyrg. 'future'] – and then we opened a joint fund to which every family contributed 250 *Som*. Finally we started drafting a business plan: we wanted to invest one million *Som* in increasing and diversifying our flocks.
>
> In 2007, our business plan was finally accepted. But they allocated only 100,000 *Som* to the whole *ayil okmotu*, 60% of which went to our village, and *Asyk* received only 20,000 *Som*, which is more or less what a *bay* [Kyrg. 'rich man'] spends on lunch. So we had to drop our initial plan to buy calves and bought nine lambs instead. Five families left the cooperative immediately – they lost interest – so we distributed the nine lambs among the rest of us. We also never received any of the promised support from specialists – they just never came. Instead, the *ayil okmou* offered us a piece of barren land at the end of the village, but it was of no use for us, so we refused.
>
> I don't really know what the other four families are doing now. We all work on our own again and only talk to each other to coordinate the repayment of the loan. I never heard of the other two cooperatives again either. For my own family, things went well. The two lambs have grown into sheep; we sold them but kept the offspring. I would like to invest more in animal husbandry, but in a different way. If I cooperate again, then only with responsible people whom I know. I think the whole program was an experiment. After all, it was a state program, so I think the governor reported hundreds of cooperatives and pocketed the rest of the money.›

According to Almaz Tschonov, a specialist for agrarian cooperatives at the Agrarian University in Bishkek, regional state representatives would often make do with establishing cooperatives only on paper, so that the program's overall effect was rather counterproductive[114]. However, the failed 'experiment' in Kyzyl-Tuu also shows that, for the time being, promoting cooperation and the formation of credit groups beyond people's immediate networks of trust is a difficult endeavor. Approaching people through household, family and kin networks may therefore be more promising than through the *ayil okmotu*, in which people put little trust anyway.

9.3.4 Cash: access to loans and credits

The practices around the access to irrigation water, machines and workforce show that land cultivation today is closely linked to monetary exchange. In addition, cash is also required to buy fertilizers[115], pesticides, or seeds. New seeds, for instance, are often expensive and hard to come by. In 2007, barley seeds cost 10 KGS/kg, wheat – 13 KGS/kg, sainfoin – 25 KGS/kg, and clover up to 50 KGS/kg. Thus, sowing one hectare

[114] Personal communication, 29 May 2007.
[115] The application of mixed manure still seems uncommon in both villages. At the time of research, only one farmer in Jergetal produced sufficient compost to manure his own *ogorod*.

of wheat or barley, for which about 250 kg of seeds are required, amounts to 2,500 to 3,250 KGS (US $60 to 80)[116]. This is equal to a local teacher's monthly salary.

In short, things that used to be allocated by the kolkhoz chairman or the brigadier in the socialist past are now often subject to negotiation and/or financial compensation. Anyone who wants to efficiently cultivate arable land needs either sufficient social capital to have access to inputs at reduced rates or sufficient financial capital to pay for the requisite sums. However, even wealthier households do not always have sufficient cash at hand to pay for larger investments, such as renting a combine to harvest their fields (up to 1,300 KGS/ha (US $31) plus fuel; see 9.3.2), or paying for a tractor bringing in the hay from their meadows (up to 150 KGS/turn (US $3.6) plus fuel). Therefore, they must raise the required sum elsewhere.

Access to local loans and 'black cash boxes'

There are different ways to raise small sums of money within a village. In order to avoid interest rates, most people first try to borrow from relatives or neighbors. Many people become lenders or borrowers depending on their liquidity, or they lend and borrow at the same time.

> "Sometimes I lend money to other people, and sometimes I ask other people [for money]." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a29]

However, interest-free borrowing is only practised among kin and good friends, and for small amounts of money. If people need more than a few hundred *Som*, they usually approach a local credit self-help group [Russ. *gruppa samopomoshch'*]. At the time of research, Jergetal had about ten to fifteen such groups, while the number of groups in Kyzyl-Tuu was reportedly smaller but could not be determined. Credit groups usually organize themselves within a neighborhood or a family. The fees of all group members were pooled and are given as a loan to either a group member or to applicants from outside the group. The loans provided range from 300 to 2,000 KGS (US $7 to 48); they are limited to a period of one month and charged at an interest rate of 20% (sometimes lower for group members). Usually, no collateral is required; people know each other in the village and judge an applicant's creditworthiness according to his/her number of livestock or the existence of a regular wage or pension[117]. According to Jangyl Kozhomuratova, financial expert with CAMP, credit self-help groups have become very popular in recent years. From a juridical perspective, however, they are termed illegal, because they are not officially registered and do not pay taxes, but make a financial profit[118].

Another way to obtain a small loan is through individual money-lenders. These are comparably wealthy people who lend money to others if opportunity arises. Private money-lenders usually apply the same interest rates and credit durations than groups, and lend comparable sums of up to 2,000 KGS (US $48) for one month. Some of them however prefer a collateral, such as a passport or another official document[119].

Last but not least, there is the concept of 'black cash boxes' [Russ. *tschornaya kassa*]. These are rotating savings associations based on social get-togethers within a neighborhood or kin group. All members of such a network pay a fixed sum of around 50 to 100 KGS (US $1.2 to 2.4) every month, which they receive when it is their turn to invite the others to a gathering at their own home. Thus, all members receive a considerably large sum of money once, which they could not raise otherwise. The concept is also highly popular on the *jailoo*, where it blends with the social practice of

[116] Personal communication with a farmer, Jergetal, 7 Nov 2007; and with the head of Kyzyl-Tuu A/O, 7 Dec 2007.
[117] Personal communication with a member of a women's credit group, Jergetal, 14 November 2007.
[118] Personal communication with Jangyl Kozhomuratova, financial expert with the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP), Bishkek, 30 May 2007.
[119] Personal communication with a private money lender, Kyzyl-Tuu, 10 December 2007.

sherine (see 10.4.2). Kandiyoti (1999, 4) assumes that rotating savings associations in rural Uzbekistan account for the largest volume of cash in circulation based on private transfers. Nevertheless, *tschornaya kassas* often escape formal detection of money transfers due to their social embeddedness. From a juridical point of view, however, they are absolutely legal since they do not generate any profit.

Individual access to regional credit schemes

However, loans and donations provided locally are usually not enough to cover large investments of several thousand *Som*. In such cases, people must either sell livestock (see 10.1.2) or apply for a loan from a regional credit institute or support program. At the time of research, the most popular rural credit institute in Naryn *oblast* was FINCA, a global micro-credit provider with several regional branches in Kyrgyzstan[120]. FINCA provides agricultural loans to individuals and groups, starting at 12,500 and rising to 1,000,000 KGS (US $300 to 24,125). Individual applicants must provide sufficient collateral in the form of physical (house, car, TV set) or financial assets (livestock). Annual interest rates vary between 24 and 42%, depending on the type of loan and the risk involved. The maximum duration is 18 months for individuals and 12 months for groups[121]. Although FINCA has simple procedures and actively seeks to approach the rural population, households with little or no livestock and without other valuable assets often hesitate about applying for such credits. During interviews, many smallholders and people with no livestock repeatedly expressed their fear of being unable to repay a loan.

> "How will we pay back [a loan] without a salary? In the end we anyway will have to sell livestock to pay back the loan. There is no other income, so it is better to sell livestock." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [1c34]

Many respondents expressed their unease about the idea of using their own house as collateral, fearing that they might lose it if they failed to repay a loan in time.

> "I once thought about taking out a loan. But to get one you need to have animals or you have to mortgage your house. Now I don't have any animals, and I don't dare to mortgage the house, because it's very risky. So I'd rather get by without loans." (Retired accountant, no livestock, Jergetal) [2b10]

Even public servants with a regular income are not necessarily able to take out loans, since their salary does not allow them to put something aside.

> "I do not take out loans – how should I repay them? The child allowance is 800 *Som*, which is not even sufficient for a bag of flour. (…) My salary is 3,000 *Som* – it's not sufficient. I spend half of the money on clothes for them [her children], and with the other half I must buy products." (Female teacher, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

Others again consider the application procedure too demanding or lengthy. A herder from Jergetal who spends summer and winter on the pastures told me that he had once tried to apply for a loan but gave up when things became too complicated: "You aren't well versed in these things if you spend all your time on the *jailoo*." Last but not least, there are also people who mistrust formal financial institutions in general.

Wealthier farmers more often make use of credit offered by FINCA and others, such as the regional *ayil bank* (village bank) or a rural UNDP-funded micro-credit program. According to Sergey Kim, FINCA representative in Naryn, 90% of all agricultural loans are invested in livestock or fodder production, while only 10% are invested in cash crops or other farm-related activities. The respondents' accounts in both villages confirm this estimation: with one exception, all interviewed debtors used their loans to buy animals or additional winter fodder (see 10.1). Only one mid-sized farmer in

[120] www.finca.org; accessed 16 March 2010.
[121] Personal communication with Sergey Kim, FINCA representative, Naryn town, 19 November 2007.

Jergetal had taken two credits of 70,000 and 80,000 KGS (US $1,689 and 1,930) to buy more agricultural machines, which he now rents out to others (see 9.3.2).

> "There is no life without money. (…) The only way is to take out loans. It is very important to prepare the fodder for the animals." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1a4]

In general, mainly mid-sized farmers make use of credit on offer at regional level: they do not usually have enough livestock to raise the required sum themselves, but can nevertheless afford to furnish sufficient guarantees. By contrast, large farmers with more than 70 livestock units apply less often since they can usually sell the required number of animals to raise cash (see 10.1.2).

Common access to regional credit schemes

For the less wealthy, agricultural group credits are thus often the only way to finance larger investments. A joint application lowers the individual risk, but requires people to trust each other. Yet as described above (9.3.3), there is often little trust beyond the household and immediate kin, so cooperation among non-relatives is the exception rather than the rule. However, finding enough co-applicants within a household can be difficult when most children have already left the village.

> "I could apply for loans with my sons, but they aren't here. (…) And my neighbors don't join in." (Retired accountant, no livestock, Jergetal) [2b10]

Nevertheless, there are a few successful examples, especially from Jergetal, where a UNDP-funded project trains people on how to apply for group credit from the *ayil bank*. At the time of research, seven such groups with each about six families were active in Jergetal[122]. However, according to a member of the credit group *Iigilig* [Kyrg. 'success'], the *ayil bank's* loans would be bound to investments in livestock only. By contrast, a similar yet state-run program to support local cooperatives and promote micro-credit in Kyzyl-Tuu did little to foster investments in the agrarian sector (Box 9b above).

9.4 Access to agrarian commodity markets

Only a few households in the two villages are able to generate any cash income at all from farming (cf. Table 5.5). Overall, 16% of all households in Jergetal and 12% in Kyzyl-Tuu earn some money from selling hay, sainfoin or barley, as well as wheat or potatoes. In both villages, the proportion is highest among households without any noteworthy pasture-related cash income (including households without livestock and smallholders): in these groups, about every fourth household can sell part of its harvest. Since most households cultivate at least a small piece of land, this means that, on the one hand, the bulk of local production serves people's subsistence needs (including fodder cultivation for animals). On the other hand, it may also indicate that some of the exchange of food and fodder crops takes place outside the capitalized economy, to which many rural producers still have only limited access.

Difficult access to capitalized commodity markets

In order to foster competitive market structures after the socialist collapse, the Kyrgyz government quickly freed prices in the farm sector and eliminated most subsidies by the mid-1990s (compare 4.2). At the beginning, however, the effect was detrimental for many farmers, since output prices rose less quickly than key input prices. In general, the process of establishing integrated, well-functioning rural markets in Kyrgyzstan has

[122] Personal communication, Sulaika Mambetalieva, Naryn representative of the UNDP Poverty Reduction Programme, 19 November 2007.

been very slow. On the one hand, the national market is poorly integrated and hardly connected to external markets, so most farmers still respond to local prices. On the other hand, local and regional commodity markets are still characterized by high domestic transaction costs, including expenditures for transport, middlemen and bribes to officials. In addition, many rural producers face difficulties in accessing up-to-date information about market prices, which are subject to considerable seasonal and long-term fluctuations (Christensen and Pomfret 2007; Ryazanov 2007; GEF 2008, 5). According to one farmer from Jergetal, many of his neighbors also fail to understand the basic market principles of supply and demand:

> "If I cultivate wheat this year, and the harvest and the market price is good (…) then they [the neighbors] cultivate wheat too. They do not know what the price will be like next year, whether there will be any demand – they do not bear it in mind." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [3a15]

Many producers thus face serious obstacles to entering capitalized commodity markets beyond the local level. Evidence from the two case study villages shows that this is especially true for crops and vegetables, while the situation regarding animal husbandry is somewhat different (see 10.1).

Marketing of wheat, vegetables, hay and fodder crops

Marketing of crops in Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu is mostly local. The exception was in the early noughties, when Jergetal was regularly visited by traders who bought large quantities of potatoes for the Kazakh market. This market outlet, which provided a valuable income for many otherwise asset-poor households, collapsed after a few years, when positive tests for golden nematodes led the Kazakh government to impose an import ban on Kyrgyz potatoes. Since then, the cultivation of potatoes and other vegetables has remained at the small scale of the *ogorod*.[123]

The few households who can harvest sufficient wheat and barley usually sell their surplus to their neighbors who cannot cultivate their own grain. One mid-sized farmer from Jergetal whose customers lack the necessary cash to pay for his wheat also gives away part of his wheat as in-kind loans. Although not all of his borrowers are able to repay the annual 20% in-kind interest rate, he plans to extend this kind of business. In addition, he built a flour mill where people can mill their own grain in return for cash.

Many households with little or no livestock cultivate fodder and hay in order to sell it to their neighbors with large herds of their own. For many smallholders and households without livestock, this is a highly valuable source of cash income. While some sell the readymade hay by the truckload, others let their customers cut the hay themselves, which reduces the price by around 50%. Due to the constant drought of the early noughties and the resulting general fodder shortage (see 9.3.1), prices for fodder rapidly increased in Naryn *oblast*. In addition, the fodder market is subject to considerable seasonal price fluctuations. Within only three months, for instance, the price of one big truck of hay in Kyzyl-Tuu rose from 5,000 KGS (US $120) in September 2007 to 8,000 KGS (US $230) by December 2007 – a difference equivalent to a local public servant's monthly salary or to the price of an ordinary sheep. Most respondents expected prices to rise further in the near future.

> "This year the price for hay was very high, about 5,000 *Som*. Now we see the expensive prices – before, we thought 'that's very expensive', but now it's really expensive." (Smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2a10]

[123] In May 2008, Kazakhstan eventually lifted the potato ban under the condition that all Kyrgyz potatoes pass plant quarantine border outposts having laboratory equipment necessary to test golden nematode (AKIPress News Agency, 8 May 2008; www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-179290415.html; accessed 18 March 2010).

Unfortunately, many small producers soon weren't able to profit from the rapid price increase when their own decreasing fodder harvest no longer exceeded their domestic need. In autumn 2007, several of these households had to buy additional fodder, either from neighbors or from regional markets. As a result, they not only lost a hitherto important cash income but suddenly had to cope with additional expenses, for which many had to either sell livestock or to borrow from others.

> "This year was very difficult. I think we may buy the hay (…). This year I have to buy one truck of hay; in other years I could sell some in order to buy coal or dung cakes. (…) So we have to buy a truckload of hay for 5,000 *Som*." (Teacher, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

As a consequence, the same respondent was forced to cut down his expenditure on heating (compare Box 4d 'A smallholder's household biography'). Those with sufficient productive land, however, reported a very profitable business in 2007. One large farmer from Jergetal who cultivates several hectares of private land plus 20 hectares of LRF land earned 50,000 KGS (US $1,210) from the sale of hay to other livestock owners, even from neighboring villages. The example shows that despite prevalent environmental uncertainties, access to sufficient arable land and the use of efficient cultivation techniques can be a highly effective way of securing a household's livelihoods.

The fine line between producers and buyers

The examples from the two case study villages show that to some extent, even asset-poor households can participate in an (even purely local) agrarian commodity market by selling fodder crops and hay. However, autumn 2007 made clear that under worsening environmental conditions, the less wealthy quickly fail to sustain their production and generate sufficient surplus for sale or even cover their domestic needs. While under 'normal' conditions, their cultivation techniques may generate sufficient output, they often lack the necessary means to cope with the unexpected. As has been discussed above, gaining access to irrigation water, machinery or to more and better land requires considerable cash inputs, even if many people can rely on their good networks to bring down transaction costs. Since the less wealthy do not have the same possibilities as others to turn livestock into cash or to access larger sums of money through credit schemes, for them the line between being a net producer or net buyer can be very fine.

Thus, the current lack of financial assets among the less wealthy may eventually result in a further widening of the gap between those can afford to cultivate their land and improve farming techniques, and those who cannot. Last but not least, the general shortage of cash also places a strain on municipal budgets. With very little income from local taxation, communal authorities can hardly ever invest seriously in local infrastructure or resource protection (compare 4.2.2).

9.5 Reasons to turn away from land cultivation

By and large, there are lots of different reasons why after the collapse of the kolkhoz economy, many people have found farming extremely difficult. However, the situation today is somewhat different from during the early years of independence when property rights over land and other production-related assets still had to be redefined, and agrarian production collapsed almost completely. Since that time, most rural households have tried by some means or other to make use of their private fields, but not all have succeeded in making farming an integral part of their livelihoods.

Today, some continue to struggle and try to improve their land use practices, while others have capitulated and turned away from crop cultivation once more. Instead, many rural households now increasingly focus on animal husbandry, considering it a

more secure way of making a living (see Chapter 10); and/or they have begun to rely on remittances sent home by labor migrants, whose number have greatly increased throughout the country in recent years (cf. Thieme 2008b). Nationally, this development has not only resulted in declining wheat yields since 1997 (compare with section 4.3.6), but also in a sharp decrease in the area under crop cultivation since around 2002. As a result, only 25% of the 1.5 million hectares of arable land were used for grain production in 2007 (Mamytova and Mambetalieva 2008).

At the local level, the reasons why people turn away from crop cultivation are often similar and result from a vicious cycle of the production-related difficulties discussed above.

Environmental uncertainties and financial risks

Many respondents consider the economic risks involved in farming much higher than those facing animal husbandry. This perception is certainly influenced by the difficult environmental conditions at the time of research. In response to the sustained period of drought and the resulting endemic shortage of irrigation water, many households refrained from cultivating wheat and barley in 2007 and produced only hay instead.

> "I have 1.5 hectares of land (…). In total, the costs of cultivation would amount to about 15,000 *Som* [US $363]. If the harvest is bad, I'll go bankrupt. The risk is very high and that is why I don't do it. You have to pay for irrigation, plowing, transport, seeds – for everything. And then if you can't harvest in the end… If you have animals you'll get young ones, you can always sell them (…)." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [3c3]

Ironically enough, grain prices skyrocketed only a few months later from an average of 140 US $/t to 300 US $/t, which badly affected a large part of the rural Kyrgyz population and severely aggravated the food situation (UN 2008; Mamytova and Mambetalieva 2008).

> "We didn't grow wheat this year. Almost nobody in the village grew wheat, because of the dry climate. (…) Only a few people cultivated the land this year. Nobody knew that the prices for flour would go up." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2f14])

The large financial investments required to farm land, the insecure economic prospects and the environmental uncertainties thus constitute an important push factor in people's increased investments in livestock. Although most respondents acknowledge the necessity and the advantages of an integrated production combining land cultivation and animal husbandry, most of them assert that the first thing to do if cash was available was to increase the number of livestock, while hardly anybody envisages improving their land cultivation practices. Chapter 10 will show that such behavior also results from the high socioeconomic and symbolic value ascribed to animals in general.

Maladjusted cultivation techniques and decreased productivity

Some respondents, however, acknowledge that the low land productivity is not only a result of the difficult environmental situation but also of their own inappropriate cultivation techniques. On the one hand, these are caused by the general shortage of land and water, and the difficulty of gaining access to machinery, labor and cash, which led to many people repeatedly cultivating the same varieties on the same plots of land. Only a few manage to grow several different crops at a time or to leave part of their land intentionally fallow. On the other hand, most people who became land-owners after the socialist collapse had no experience of farming before their kolkhoz was dissolved. As Table 8.1 shows, many of those who are now farmers were once mechanics, herders or drivers, breeding specialists, accountants or journalists. Thus, many lack the necessary knowledge to cultivate the land in an effective and sustainable manner; they just do what everybody else does.

> "Nobody rotates their crops. People look at each other and grow the same as their neighbor." (Smallholder, Jergetal) [3a15]

According to several respondents, the lack of rotations and other sophisticated cultivation techniques has led to decreasing land productivity and diminishing yields. This has eventually forced some of them to give up growing any wheat and barley at all.

> "The productivity is not good – that is why we decided not to cultivate the land anymore. (…) The land is not in a good condition because we grow the same things every year." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2f3]

> "After the dissolution of the kolkhoz (…) we cultivated wheat and barley. Then, after 2000... we never fertilized the land, we just planted. And that is why nothing grows anymore. Since last year we only grow grass." (Farmer, no livestock, Jergetal) [1c9]

Consequently, the question arises as to whether people's endowment with private arable land after the collapse of the socialist economy has really been a blessing for everyone. I will take up that thought in Chapter 12, after having examined animal husbandry and the use of pastures in the next chapter.

10 Actors, practices, organizations and institutions around animal husbandry and the use of pastures

"There would be no real life here without animals. You cannot live from the land."
Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal [3a3]

In the same way in which some people benefited more than others from the often unequal distribution of arable land in the mid-1990s, the allocation of former kolkhoz animals was typified by fraudulence and cheating (Chapter 7). As a result, far from all households that set out into the emerging market economy did so with the same chances of success, even though they had received secure, private property rights over livestock. This was already obvious during and immediately after the privatization process, when the number of animals began to fall steeply and many of the less wealthy lost their private flocks. Despite these hardships, however, livestock rearing has remained a key pillar of rural livelihoods to the present day. In recent years, many people in the two case study villages have even more than ever turned towards animal husbandry, thus responding to the difficulties related to commercial land cultivation (Chapter 9). Nevertheless, there are still striking disparities between households. While a few wealthy households own large flocks of sheep, horses, yaks and cows, many struggle even to keep a few animals. These disparities are also reflected in the household typology developed in Chapter 5.

Given these persistent disparities, and in view of the initial political intention to empower rural households by endowing them with private livestock, I look in this chapter at how households and individuals in the two case study villages can make a living from animal husbandry. Why do people value animals so highly, how do they make use of them for their economic and social wellbeing, and how do they organize animal husbandry within and beyond their household? In this context, questions regarding the access to and use of pastures come to the forefront of my analysis. Since pastures are indispensable for animal husbandry and pastoral production, analyzing the institutional context and people's organizing practices in relation to this resource is key to gaining a better understanding of the role of livestock in rural livelihoods. I therefore also ask how different types of households access and use pastures, and how they interact with other private and public actors.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 10.1 examines the economic value and the socioeconomic significance of livestock for rural households and analyzes when and how animals are converted into other forms of capital, such as cash or social relations. Section 10.2 then describes the different ways in which herding is negotiated and organized at local level and how it can contribute to the livelihoods of rural households. After that, analysis concentrates on the access to and the use of pastures in the two case study villages. Section 10.3 looks at the Kyrgyz pasture legislation and the organizing practices of state representatives, while section 10.4 focuses on local herders and their households, and describes existing conflicts over pastures. Finally, section 10.5 examines how various actors anticipated the 2009 reform of Kyrgyz pasture laws, about which only vague rumors were circulating at the time of research[124].

[124] On 6 February 2009 the Kyrgyz parliament passed a new law 'On pastures', which came into effort by a government resolution dated 24 June 2009. I had already completed the empirical fieldwork for this study by then.

10.1 "There is no life without livestock here": the role of livestock in rural livelihoods

"We use livestock everywhere – we sell it, we slaughter it, we use it as a gift."
Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal [2f14]

After 1996, livestock numbers started to increase again and developed more or less constantly in Naryn *oblast* and the two study villages (compare with Figures 5.1 and 5.2). The role of livestock in the rural Kyrgyz economy and its significance for rural livelihoods can therefore hardly be overestimated, and people have good reason to say that "there is no life without livestock here". However, the often-heard statement refers to more than just the economic value of animals. As evidence shows, livestock also has an important social function for the rural Kyrgyz.

10.1.1 The socioeconomic value of livestock

Livestock for self-sufficiency

Meat and fat are essential elements of the Kyrgyz diet. Although potatoes and bread dominate everyday meals, wealthier household in particular often supplement them with smaller or larger quantities of meat. Most households slaughter one or several of their animals at the onset of winter to store the meat in a dry and cool place and use it by and by[125]. Thus, most households have a constant basic demand for animals for self-sufficiency, which is one of the reasons why less wealthy households often have difficulties sustaining or increasing their flock size in the long run.

> "The number did not increase a lot because (…) we also use animals for our own consumption." (Farmer, smallholder, Jergetal) [2a33]

Milk products are just as important as meat. They mainly include butter, milk, yogurt, cream and dried yogurt, as well as *kymyz* (fermented mare's milk) which is mainly consumed on the summer pastures [Kyrg. *jailoo*]. Between May and September, when the animals are usually on the *jailoo*, most households retain at least one cow in their yard to have a constant supply of milk.

Livestock as financial stock and investment fund

The rural financial service system has improved somewhat in recent years, and Naryn town meanwhile offers a variety of banks and credit providers. However, people's trust in the financial sector seems to be generally low, and many are not yet accustomed to making use of its services. Instead, nearly all respondents prefer to invest in livestock whenever they have some surplus cash. Although animals require care and entail further investments for fodder, shelter, medicine and herding fees, most people prefer to keep sufficient livestock because they can convert it into cash whenever they need to (10.1.2 explains when, why and how people do this). Thus, rich and poor people alike equate animals with money:

> "It is possible to take out loans, but we are not interested in doing so. I have credit in hand already – it is livestock." (Large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

> "If you keep sheep you [can] sell the wool – livestock is money." (Electrician, no livestock, Jergetal) [1a16]

[125] In Kyrgyz, this practice is called *sogum soyuu*, which literally translates as 'to prepare meat for winter'.

In a similar sense, animals are often equated with financial security. Although most credit grantors do not accept animals as collateral, people who apply for loans often rely on their flock as a last resort to pay back the debt if they cannot find the money elsewhere. But there are also very few alternative ways of investing money locally. I have shown in Chapter 9 that land cultivation is associated with numerous obstacles, especially for less wealthy households. By contrast, animal husbandry offers much better prospects. People can often make a profit in less than a year (fattening offspring during summer and selling it in autumn), although the risks involved are considerable, too: animals may be stolen or die from diseases, they may be eaten by wolves or get lost on the *jailoo*. Nevertheless, most people consider animal husbandry the only viable way of making a living in the village.

> "If there weren't any animals here, if we had no animals, there would be no real life. You can't live from the land." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [3a3]

Consequently, most households in Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu consider animal husbandry one of their most important cash income sources (compare 5.2.3). When asked about their future plans, nearly all respondents said that their main goal was to increase their household's number of animals.

> "More animals means more money – if possible, we will try to increase their numbers." (Herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [5a1]

Only a few wealthy respondents say they have a sufficiently large flock, and that keeping more animals would not be profitable anymore[126].

Livestock generates jobs for professional herders

Besides these direct economic benefits, livestock also indirectly generates rural income opportunities. The growing number of animals in rural areas has also led to an increased demand for professional herders to take care of other people's animals during the summer or throughout the whole year. In both villages, up to 30 herders and their households spend summer on the *jailoo* herding other people's animals in return for payment in cash or in kind. Thus, herding has become one of the few income opportunities to be found locally (see 10.2.2 for details).

Livestock as a pivotal point for the maintenance of social relations

Livestock also constitutes an important pivotal point around which rural Kyrgyz organize their social relations. Social status and wealth are first and foremost measured by the quantity of livestock a person or a household possesses. Households with little or no livestock are usually considered poor, while local definitions of middle-class and wealthy households vary considerably. For instance, households with comparably large flocks (large farmers) are usually considered 'rich people' [Kyrg. *bailar*] by others, but often call themselves 'middle rich' [Russ. *srednji bagatyi*]. In qualitative terms, hens and goats are often associated with poverty, while wealthier households can afford to invest in more expensive animals such as merino sheep, horses and yaks[127]. This wider social significance of livestock results from the fact that households do not only eat and sell animals, but also use them to establish and maintain social relations with others. Parents usually endow their children with livestock once they marry and start their own household, and animals are an important part of the dowry. If a young man migrates to an urban area and cannot take along his share of animals, his parents or brothers often pool all their children's livestock and manage it jointly. Such joint flocks form the pivotal point of many multi-local households (Schoch 2008; Schoch et al. forthcoming).

[126] When her assignment was over, one of my local research assistants immediately invested her salary in four sheep and entrusted them to her family.
[127] Personal communication with former brigadier, Kyzyl-Tuu, 19 Apr 2007.

Kyrgyz also have a distinct tradition of life cycle feasts [Kyrg. *toi*] such as weddings, birthdays, funerals and commemoration days, as well as social gatherings such as *sherine* (neighborhood circles; see 10.4.2), which are used to reaffirm social networks. In such feasts, food and drinks play a central role, and whoever invites his relatives, neighbors and friends is expected to serve large quantities of meat. This entails two fundamental problems for the less wealthy. First, many smallholders and households without livestock say that repeated expenditure on feasts was one of the main reasons why they have not succeeded in building up their own flock since 1994. Although poor households usually receive monetary and in-kind support from their kin to pay for a funeral, many of them say they used up their last few animals when they had to bury one of their family members.

> "As you know, Kyrgyz people have many feasts involving lots of expenses. Later on my husband died and his brother, too, so now I have [only] one cow with a calf. When my husband died there were three sheep left. We used a lot of livestock for the funeral. After the funeral almost nothing was left, only the cow. Later on my mother-in-law died, so we again spent livestock." (Female smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b15]

The second problem is that participating in a feast usually means bringing along a gift, which can put considerable pressure on guests. Kuehnast and Dudwick (2004) show that the cost of gifts has considerably increased after 1991, so less wealthy people increasingly have to refuse invitations. This can strain their social networks in the long term: "At the same time, the non-poor increasingly refrain from inviting poorer relatives (…) to spare them the burden of purchasing gifts" (Kuehnast and Dudwick 2004, 4).

Thus livestock is used either directly or indirectly as a gift to establish and maintain social relations with others. During my stay on *Arpa jailoo* in summer 2008, a wealthy livestock owner from Kyzyl-Tuu came to visit his herder. Realizing that there was a herders' gathering the same day, he donated a lamb from his flock as a prize for *ulak tartysh*, a traditional horse game. A few days later, the winner invited his *jailoo* neighbors for a feast, during which the lamb was served and the wealthy sponsor was praised for his benevolence and was showered with good wishes.

10.1.2 Sale of animals, meat and wool: the role of markets

In the absence of a regular cash income, many households regularly sell animals to cover their daily expenses. Expenditures include food items, clothes, shoes, school fees, books and uniforms for children, but also the cost of gifts or organizing feasts. The need for cash is particularly acute in autumn, when the school year starts and most feasts are organized. Land cultivation – seeds, means of transport and fuel (compare 9.3) – and animal husbandry also cause a constantly recurring demand for cash. Many livestock owners have difficulties to produce sufficient winter fodder. Therefore, they must repeatedly sell animals in order to purchase additional hay and other forage and thereby ensure the survival of the remaining flock.

> "At the moment, we are selling livestock in order to keep the livestock. For example, we have to buy medicine and fodder." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1a4]

The same is true of herding households, who often sell part of their flock in spring in order to cover the costs of pastoral mobility such as food and transport (compare with 10.2.2). In the case of households with only few animals of their own and little natural reproduction, such practices may engender a vicious cycle, resulting in a stagnant or decreasing flock size in the long term.

> "In the past there were only few [households without livestock], but today there are more of them… because it is not easy… no help… no seeds… the flour price has increased. And if you sell animals, the price is bad. Because of the sale of animals there are more people today who have only land. It's not easy." (Farmer, no livestock, Jergetal) [1c9]

Similar practices exist in connection with credits. Several respondents who borrowed money from a commercial credit provider had to sell sold part of their flock in order to repay the credit and the often high interest rate.

> "I have taken 40,000 *Som* [as a credit; US $965]. I sold a lot of livestock in order to pay it back, so I decided not to take credits anymore in future. (…) It was with 26% [interest rate]. I regret that I took this credit, it would have been better not to take it and just live by selling livestock." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1a4]

Livestock is also sold for specific, large investments such as machines or houses. Several respondents have sold several dozen animals to renovate their old house or build a new one in the village. Some wealthier livestock owners have even invested the sales revenues in building a second house for their children living in the capital city of Bishkek. Last but not least, many people also sell an animal when they realize that it has contracted a disease. Näscher (2009) describes how many livestock owners in Kyzyl-Tuu try to get rid of a sick animal so that it cannot infect the rest of the household's flock. From an epidemiological point of view, this practice appears highly problematic, as it fosters the spread of highly infectious diseases such as Brucellosis or foot-and-mouth disease.

When to sell what

The different needs which cause people to sell their animals also influence when and where they sell. In general, the less wealthy sell more often. With few cash savings and hardly any income-generating alternatives at hand, they cannot wait for livestock prices to increase, but must sell an animal whenever the need for cash arises.

> "We sell [livestock] whenever we need money, even in spring or winter, just any time. (…) When we need to go somewhere, for instance to feasts. (…) If it is really necessary we ask for a loan and we sell livestock to pay it back." (Smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3b26]

By contrast, wealthier households often observe price fluctuations and sell only when prices are high. Thus, some of them fatten their animals during winter in order to sell them in spring, when prices are up to 25% higher than in autumn[128].

> "It depends on the market price. If it is good, then we sell livestock and keep the money." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3b6]

The ability of wealthy households to react to market demands and take advantage of price fluctuations is also reflected in their strategic thinking about flock compositions. In recent years, several of them have begun to diversify their livestock holdings by investing in new types of animals. These include merino sheep, whose wool is increasingly sought-after by Chinese traders, as well as horses, which can be sold at a great profit to Kazakhstan.

> "If the price for wool is high, then maybe the meat price will be low. So it is important to keep both. (…) [That is why] I am also interested in keeping wool sheep and increasing their number." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [2b14]

Since wool prices do not fluctuate seasonally but year to year, producers sometimes store their wool for another year, hoping that prices will increase. This requires dry storage facilities, which less wealthy farmers are often unable to afford. By contrast, the quality of other wool types does not meet industrial standards, so households with

[128] Personal communication, representative of Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, 22 May 2007.

goats and fat-tailed sheep usually sell the whole skin of an animal after slaughtering it. Skins are sold to traveling traders who visit the village, but prices fluctuate widely and may drop by 50% within a few weeks only (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Market prices for animals and pastoral products, Kyzyl-Tuu (own survey, various respondents)

	KGS	US $
Livestock[a]		
Calf (one year)	10,000	240
Cow	20,000 - 30,000	480 - 725
Bull	25,000 - 30,000	600 - 725
Horse	21,000 - 40,000	510 - 965
Sheep, fat-tail breed	2,500 - 3,000	60 - 70
Sheep, pure breed	3,500 - 6,000	85 - 145
Yak	17,000 - 20,000	410 - 485
Skins[b]		
Sheep skin, Nov 2007	70 - 80	1.9 - 2.2
Sheep skin, Oct 2007	150	3.6
Wool[c]		
1 kg Merino wool, 2007	40	0.96
1 kg Merino wool, 2006	31	0.75
1 kg Merino wool, 2005	~45	~1.1

[a] *Average autumn sales prices for the At-Bashy livestock market, 2007*
[b] *Prices paid by traders in Kyzyl-Tuu*
[c] *Prices paid by traders in At-Bashy; one sheep produces between 3 to 5 kg wool per year.*

Where to sell

Marketing opportunities for animals, meat and wool exist at all levels. At local level, neighbors buy animals from each other, and middlemen and traveling traders regularly visit the village to purchase animals, wool and skins directly from their owners. In summer, some traders also visit the *jailoo* to purchase animals or milk products (see 10.4.2). Interestingly, it is not only the less wealthy who use this opportunity to sell, although the prices offered by neighbors, middlemen and traders are usually below regional and national standards. If opportunity arises, even comparably rich livestock owners sometimes conclude a deal with a trader or with their neighbors.

There are various livestock *bazaars* at regional level. Many people from Jergetal visit the weekly *Örnök bazaar* on their way to Naryn, where sheep and goats are traded every Saturday. Also on Saturday, but only during summer, horses and cows are traded in *Kyrk Bozüi*, on the way to Bishkek and the *Kumbel jailoo* (see Map 10.1). Both places are easy to reach from Jergetal, so animals can be driven there and there is no need to pay for a truck. In addition, livestock can also be sold on the large daily *bazaar* in Naryn town. In the case of Kyzyl-Tuu, most people sell and buy in At-Bashy, where one of the country's largest livestock *bazaars* is held every Sunday and where even Chinese and Kazakh middlemen mingle with the other visitors. Transport is usually organized by local truck drivers, who charge around 50 KG (US $1.2) per sheep or goat and up to 250 KGS (US $6) per cow or horse. The country's largest livestock *bazaar* is held every Sunday in Tokmok. Located only a few kilometers from Bishkek and a few hundred meters from the Kazakh border, the market usually offers the highest prices for cows and horses. While people from Kyzyl-Tuu hardly ever travel to Tokmok, there are weekly transports from Jergetal costing around 600 to 700 KGS per cow or horse (US $14 to 17), depending on the number of animals. Selling animals in Tokmok thus only pays off for those who want to sell more than one animal, since otherwise the transport costs outweigh the better sales revenues. A few households also use their personal relations with household members, other relatives or friends living in the capital to sell directly at the large urban *bazaars* of Bishkek. This mainly concerns

the sale of mutton, beef and yak meat, which can be sold at high profit to an urban clientele. One labor migrant from a comparably wealthy family from Kyzyl-Tuu regularly sells yak meat from his household's herd at *Osh bazaar* in Bishkek and among his urban friends. If prices are high, he also buys and resells his neighbors' animals. Thus, migration to urban areas and the resulting multi-locality of households can open up direct market access for rural producers.

In general, less wealthy households prefer local traders and regional markets, where access – i.e. transport – costs are lower than on the national market. By contrast, wealthier households often sell at every level, since they can afford to take a decision depending on the situation and current prices, and because they can also make use of generally better social networks.

10.1.3 Practices to increase flocks

When asked for their household's main long-term objective, most respondents said that increasing the number of animals was their main aim. Evidence from the two case study villages shows that people invest in livestock in different ways, and how they try to build up their flock. Wealthier respondents in particular are often proud that they have managed to build up their private flock through **professional stockbreeding** and without resorting to credits. Many of them are former kolkhoz herders, brigadiers or breeding specialists, who have used their knowledge and practical experience of animal husbandry to keep reproduction rates high and thus constantly increase their flock.

> "It depends on each person's effort. (…) Today we have about 150 sheep, 30 horses and about 15 cows. Life is good now. (…) I tried to keep the offspring, but I never bought livestock." (Former brigadier, mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a16]

Experience is especially needed in spring-time, when the ewes give birth and professional handling helps to minimize fatalities among the offspring. Other livestock owners stress the importance of **selective sale and purchase**. Whenever they sell an adult animal, they use part of the revenue to buy another young animal.

> "We usually sell a calf and buy a sheep, [and] some money is left for living. We continued like this for several years, selling one animal and buying another, and breeding." (Herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a23]

Another way to increase a private flock is to **reinvest revenues from the sale of wheat, barley, hay or potatoes** in animals. However, since less wealthy households produce neither large quantities nor a large variety of crops (compare 10.1), only a few wealthy farmers have been able successful in combining farming and animal husbandry, and in reinvesting the revenues from one sector to balance seasonal losses of the other one (and vice versa). Less wealthy households often put aside part of their **child allowances** for months and years to buy animals. Although people hardly ever mention it explicitly, it can be assumed that **remittances** from labor migrants are often used to buy new animals. In her case study from Southern Kyrgyzstan, Schoch (2008) shows that a large part of the remittances sent back by labor migrants is invested in livestock. Given the importance of livestock and the lack of alternative investment opportunities, it can be assumed that in Naryn *oblast* also, remittances are one of the backbones of animal husbandry.

Those who do not have sufficient cash savings or who lack other reliable cash income sources to buy animals often take out **loans** from professional lenders. However, as in the case of credit for land cultivation, neither very poor nor very wealthy households are among the borrowers – the former cannot furnish sufficient guarantees and the latter have sufficient savings of their own. At the same time, loans provided by wealthy villagers and local credit self-help group are usually too small to buy animals. Therefore, it is mainly middle-class households that make use of credit to develop their flocks. In the case of Jergetal, several of them have benefited from a

UNDP program in the early 2000s that taught livestock owners to draft a business plan and eventually provided them with group credits. Those who repaid in time later received another loan on more favorable terms (see 9.3.4 for details on credit and loans).

Many of the less wealthy can only establish, increase or keep their own flock because they receive **support from their own family and kin**. Young families in particular often depend on their parents' and relatives' giving them animals as a present when a child is born. Yet even established households sometimes require support from their parents. In one case, a herder from Kyzyl-Tuu sold all his remaining animals when his only paying customer moved away. After four years without livestock and with no regular job, he received a cow from his father and eventually decided to work as a herder again.

10.2 Herding: practices, preconditions and negotiations

Already in Soviet times, numerous local households made a living from working as employed kolkhoz herders (compare 6). After 1991, however, the centrally administered livestock sector disintegrated and many herders suddenly found themselves deprived of once attractive wages and premiums. This – and the fact that livestock numbers collapsed in the early 1990s – caused many kolkhoz herders to stop moving to the remote summer pastures during summer. There was nobody to pay them for their work and they did not have enough own livestock to practise transhumance in a profitable way. Moreover, the trucks that were once used to support the herders throughout the year had been sold off, the cultural centers on remote summer pastures had been privatized, and the roads and bridges that once linked the highlands to the lowlands were no longer maintained. Only a few, therefore, carried on moving to *jailoo* every summer, either because they managed to keep sufficient livestock after the dissolution of the kolkhoz or because they found someone who would entrust them with enough animals. The majority, however, remained in the lowlands all year round, herding their private flock in the vicinity of the village. Consequently, the village-adjacent pastures soon began to show signs of serious overuse, especially after 1996 when livestock numbers began to rise again (Fitzherbert 2000; Ludi 2003; Undeland 2005). At the same time, people began to use their private plots of land and to engage in agro-pastoral activity. As a consequence, the private cultivation of crops around villages increased – and so did the need to re-organize animal husbandry at local and household level (Farrington 2005). Thus, in the late 1990s, new herding and pasture-use practices emerged, both in terms of first attempts to regulate relations between herders and customers, and in the form of central orders to coordinate agricultural and pastoral activities. Some of these organizing practices have become more or less institutionalized since then, either informally through repeated behavior or formally through centrally defined (and contested) herding fees.

10.2.1 Common and private herding practices

Depending on the season, herding practices are either based on neighborhood, family and kin, or other personal relationships.

Common herding on village adjacent pastures (*mal kesüü*)

In winter, when most animals are kept in and around the village, the majority of households now participates in *mal kesüü*[129], a neighborhood-based rotational herding scheme. Every morning, a herder collects together all the animals in a neighborhood,

[129] *Mal* translates literally from the Kyrgyz as 'livestock' and *kesüü* – as 'herding by turns'.

takes them to the village-adjacent pastures and brings them back to the village in the evening, where they spend the night in the stables. According to *mal kesüü*, every household in a neighborhood – about 15 to 20 households – has to appoint a herder to take care of the neighborhood flock for one day. Depending on the size of the neighborhood, every household thus has to herd the flock once every two to three weeks. In both villages, all households with livestock within a neighborhood participate in *mal kesüü*, except those with large private flocks and/or a private barn outside the village (compare 10.4.5). These households usually herd their animals themselves or employ an own herder (see below).

In summer, when most animals are sent to the summer pastures, *mal kesüü* is only practised to herd the few animals left behind in the village. These are mainly milking cows or weak animals.

Common herding among relatives

During the summer, most people prefer to entrust their animals to someone from their own family or kin who – in most cases together with his own household – spends the summer months on the alpine summer pastures (hereinafter referred to as 'herding households'). In such a case, remuneration mostly takes place in the form of reciprocal help. "You can't take money from your relatives" is often heard among herders who take care of their relatives' livestock. Instead, their relatives in the village take care of their arable land during summer and provide support during labor-intensive times. Cutting hay for the herding household is the most widespread reciprocal service. In most cases, relatives also contribute to the transport costs to and from the summer pastures, or provide their own truck or tractor if possible.

Herding for paying customers

Those who have no herder among their close relatives usually look for a reliable herder in their neighborhood or hamlet who is ready to tend their flock during summer. Meanwhile, more than 20 households in each of Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu offer their professional herding services to others during the summer; a few of them also do so during the winter. Just like private entrepreneurs, these herding households are in open competition with one another. While newer ones must actively look for customers, more experienced herders often work for the same clients every year. However, since flock sizes often fluctuate, even the latter must constantly secure their clientele.

> "As a herder, you have to look for new customers every four to five months." (Herder, Arpa *jailoo*) [2b3]

Some herders work for only one or two households, others for up to seven, depending on how many animals they and their clients have. Clients pay a monthly cash fee per animal. These herding fees vary from year to year and are subject to a complex negotiation process between the communal authorities, herders and clients (see 10.2.4). Horses are usually herded free of charge, because the herding household has the right to use and sell the mares' milk. Agreements between herder and client are generally verbal and also stipulate that the herder must compensate his customer for every lost animal, unless it dies from a disease or is killed by wolves. In the latter case, the herder must present the dead body to the owner to prove that the animal has not been lost or slaughtered. Compensation is usually done in kind by replacing a lost animal with another one (Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1 A dead sheep hanging on a pole on Arpa *jailoo*. The herder keeps the dead body to prove that the animal died of disease so that the owner does not ask him to compensate for the loss (photo by the author, 2008).

Herding for a single employer

Some herding households work for one single client. Most of these constellations take the form of employer-employee relationships, since the flock owners are usually comparably wealthy households with several hundred private animals. If they have a large flock but do not have the necessary human capital or will to move to the summer pastures themselves, rich livestock owners often prefer to employ someone else directly. In many cases, the herding household is asset-poor and sometimes does not even have any animals of its own. These relationships usually have their own specific conditions of remuneration. In some cases, the herding household receives a monthly or annual lump sum instead of a monthly fee per animal. In other cases, the monthly herding fee is lower than usual because the employer covers all the costs of transport, food, accommodation and the like. Usually, herders prefer this kind of agreement because they do not like having to negotiate with many different livestock owners.

> "You get the money from one person, as a salary. And the animals are all marked the same, and all the sheep are white. When you take livestock from different households, some people pay late – sometimes you have to wait for two months. But when there is only one, he will count and give you the money on time, without any delay." (Herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a23]

In such a relationship, the herder and his family usually spend winter in a *saray* [Kyrg. 'barn'] belonging to their employer so they can take care of the animals throughout the year. Working for a single patron thus brings with it many in-kind benefits, but can also result in a strong economic dependency on the employer. Such relationships may thus also be seen as a direct expression of the increasing socioeconomic disparities in rural areas.

Herding exclusively own livestock

In most of the abovementioned constellations, herding households mingle their own animals with those of their relatives, paying customers or employers. Only a very small number of herding households have no livestock of their own – mostly those working for a single employer. There are, however, also some households that move to the summer pastures to herd just their own animals. Most of them have at some stage herded other people's animals, but have stopped doing so when their own herd increased to the extent that they either became unable to take care of other animals or did not need the additional income from herding fees anymore.

> "For the last two years we have not been herding anymore for other people. The livestock I have is sufficient for me – why should I herd for others if I have more than 400 sheep?" (Herder, large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a4]

Most of these private herders are thus comparably wealthy and are able to cover the expense of spending summer on the pastures on their own (compare 10.2.3 below). That is why they are often called 'rich people' [Kyrg. *bailar*] by other herders who work for relatives and/or other customers and who consider themselves 'simple people' and 'true' herders [Kyrg. *karapaim el*]. Many herders also say that the number of *bailar* on Arpa has significantly increased in recent years; in summer 2008, there were three of them on *Arpa jailoo*, and one on *Kumbel jailoo* (see Table 10.2).

Table 10.2 Different types of herding agreements on Arpa and Kumbel *jailoo*, summer 2008 (own survey)

	Arpa [n=21]	**Kumbel** [n=21]
Only own animals	14%	5%
Own and relatives' animals	14%	**33%**
Own, relatives' and clients' animals	24%	29%
Own and clients' animals	**29%**	19%
Single employer's animals	14%	10%
Other	5%	5%

The boundaries between the different forms of herding arrangements are therefore often fluent, and relations between professional herders and their customers – and between employers and their employed herders – often change. This is also because herding agreements are concluded by *kyrgyz'cha*, i.e. verbally, and on a seasonal basis. People may change herder for a variety of reasons. First, a client may not be satisfied with his herder's performance if he has lost too many animals or if the sheep were not fattened enough. Second, people usually prefer to entrust their animals to a relative whenever possible, and will do so as soon as the opportunity arises. Third, livestock numbers in the two villages have increased constantly in recent years, as has the number of herding households; therefore every year there are new herders offering their professional services. Fourth, established herders often stop herding other people's animals if their own flock reaches a critical size.

Some herding households thus reorganize their income-generating activities every season – they work for different paying customers during summer, but start working for a single employer as soon as the *jailoo* season is over. The result of this constant re-organization and professional flexibility is a high degree of household mobility between different seasonal pastures, various *sarays*, the village and other places. As a consequence, household and herd mobility can often not be easily dissociated. The example presented in Box 10a illustrates that herders and (some) members of their households hardly ever stay in the village, where most of them still have their homes. The movements of herding households thus do not simply follow herd movements, but also reflect the constantly changing organizing practices and arrangements around (agro-)pastoral livelihoods at local and household level.

Box 10a Movements of herding households

Maps 10.1 and 10.2 trace the movements of several herding households between summer 2007 and summer 2008.

Map 10.1: Herding household № 40, which takes care of its own and its relatives' animals, left *Kumbel jailoo* at the end of September 2007 and moved directly to a *saray* south of Jergetal, which belongs to the herder's brother. There the family stayed over the winter, taking care of the same animals as during the summer. In late April, the herder and his household moved to the spring pastures of *Tektyr Saz*, where they put up their yurt, but repeatedly encountered problems with the herders living in the nearby *sarays*. In early June, they moved back to *Kumbel jailoo*. By contrast, herding household № 42 only moved a short distance. On 10 September 2007, the household left *Kumbel jailoo* and moved back to its private *saray* on the spring pastures of *Börülü*. There, the animals of relatives and customers were taken care of until December, then sent back to the village. In May, the relatives and customers brought their animals back to the *saray*, from where the herding household took them to the *jailoo* in early June 2008.

Map 10.2: Herding household № 3 left *Arpa jailoo* at the end of September 2007, distributed all the animals to the different clients and then spent two months in the village. At the end of November, they again collected some clients' animals and took them to the *Botosh* winter pastures, where they spent the winter in a barn belonging to an uncle of the head of household. On 15 March 2008, they moved back to Kyzyl-Tuu and distributed the clients' animals to them. They then spent one month in Bishkek. By the end of April they were back in Kyzyl-Tuu, sealed a herding agreement with a single patron and drove his flock to the *Botosh* spring pastures on 1st May, where they put up their yurt. From there, they finally moved back to *Arpa* in mid-June 2008.

Yet despite the fact that people often switch between herding practices, and that the boundaries between these different practices are sometimes blurred, they must not be seen as spontaneous, *ad hoc* practices. Today, local livestock owners have a clear choice between different forms of common and private herding, which are embedded in their social and economic relations. Thus, the different forms of herding provide an excellent example of how local organizing practices have become institutionalized over time, while still being able to adapt to a constantly changing socioeconomic context.

10.2.2 Herding as a livelihood strategy: opportunities, risks and obstacles

In recent years, herding animals has thus become one of the few income opportunities at local level. The first to exploit this opportunity were mostly former kolkhoz herders who resumed work by the late 1990s and began to offer their knowledge and experience to others in exchange for payment in cash or kind. In order to find better grazing grounds than the overused village-adjacent pastures and prevent potential conflicts with farmers, they began to use easily accessible intensive pastures (compare with 10.3.1; and Maps 10.1 and 10.2). Many of them already had their own *saray* on these pastures, which they had received or acquired during the privatization process and which they could now use as shelter for the animals.

In recent years, more and more people who had often never worked as herders before followed their example. Many of them were young people who realized that herding was one of the few viable ways of making a living without having to migrate to urban areas. Many also realized that they could not increase their own flock as long as they hired others to herd their animals during the summer.

> "We wanted to increase the number of animals we had – and that works best if you herd them yourself." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, Kumbel) [#032]

> "We would also like to have more animals of our own, but so far we haven't managed to. (…) If we had stayed in the village, we would not have any more animals. Going to the pastures is the only way we can make a living." (Herder, smallholder, Arpa) [#009]

However, not every household is able to embark upon herding as a livelihood strategy. Evidence shows that only those households with sufficient financial and human capital allied to the right knowledge can make a successful go at herding.

Key asset I: Financial capital

Apart from the few herding households who work for a single employer, only households with sufficient financial means can afford to herd. On the one hand, herding requires a considerable input of cash. A new yurt costs up to 100,000 KGS (US $2,890), and there are annually recurring costs for transport and food items. Since most clients do not pay their herding fees before autumn, a herding household without sufficient financial means of its own – e.g. livestock that can be converted into cash before the *jailoo* season starts – cannot move to the pastures in spring. On the other hand, herding other people's animals entails considerable financial risk, since every lost animal must be compensated for in kind or cash.

> "We don't have a horse, and we don't have any more livestock. If we herded for other people and lost [animals], then how are we supposed to pay them back?" (Former kolkhoz herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1c11]

Asset-poor households can thus only start herding if they find a rich employer who is ready to cover all the necessary expenses. By contrast, households with an average or above-average number of livestock often start to think about herding themselves when the cost of hiring a professional herder exceeds a certain amount.

> "In the end, it's all about money. (…) Ten Som per sheep makes 1,000 Som for a hundred sheep; 1,000 by six – because they stay on the jailoo for six months – makes 6,000 Som. And then you think that it would be better to go to the *jailoo* yourself." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [3b18]

Key asset II: Human capital

Human capital is another critical asset required to herd animals. On the one hand, spending summer on the *jailoo* means staying away from the village for at least five months. If the household's arable land is to be irrigated and cultivated, and the crops and hay meadows taken care of, a household must either split up or ask relatives or neighbors for help. That is why many herders offer to tend relatives' animals for free and ask them to look after their fields in return. Another obstacle related to human capital is that many elder people are no longer able to live on the *jailoo* or farm the fields during the absence of their son and their daughter-in-law.

> "It would be good if I could go to the *jailoo*, because I have enough animals to do so. But… my parents are old. If I go to *jailoo*, they would stay behind on their own, and the fields wouldn't be taken care of. So it's better I pay a herder." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [3a3]

Many younger families also have the problem that their children have to leave the *jailoo* once the school vacations are over. Therefore, they must find relatives who are ready to take care of their children. The same is true if household members already have a regularly paid job or have migrated (see also Schoch 2009).

> "We will herd our animals (…) in the future. But we don't have the opportunity right now. Our daughter-in-law is a teacher; she doesn't have any time. And two of our sons are in the city; they can't come at the moment." (Mid-sized farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [3a16]

On the other hand, working and living on the *jailoo* requires a sizable labor force and places particular demands on a herder and his wife. Herding animals is an exclusively

male occupation, carried out by he head of the herding household, a male relative or – in wealthier households – a paid helper. They follow the flock all day long, look after horses and cows and take care of sick animals. If possible, men also commute between the *jailoo* and the village to look after their fields when necessary and to make hay in early autumn. By contrast, women are responsible for maintaining the household on the *jailoo* under often-difficult circumstances. This includes cooking, heating, cleaning, washing clothes, fetching water and looking after the children. In addition, they milk the mares – usually five times a day – and process the milk, a time-consuming task.

This often results in an unequal distribution of work between men and women which can not only be felt on the *jailoo* itself, but is also apparent in people's narratives about life on the pastures. The following notes of an informal talk over tea with Kuban and Burul, a young but comparatively wealthy couple from Kyzyl-Tuu, may serve to illustrate this. I wondered why they did not move to the *jailoo* themselves, despite apparently having the financial wherewithal to do so[130].

> "There's too much to do here", Kuban says. "I have to cut the hay, irrigate the fields, and look after the potatoes, That's why we have taken on a relative to look after our animals." – "What if you had the choice?" – "If I had the choice, I'd go immediately. All that work – hay, irrigation, potatoes – sometimes gets boring. It's the same every year. Herding sheep would be much easier, and much more convenient." But Burul disagrees: "No, I prefer to stay in the village, to live in a house. Life on the *jailoo* is very hard for women, there's much more to do than here at home, and you have to process all the milk. By contrast, men only graze the sheep, from morning to evening." – Kuban's only response is to smile whimsically.

Key asset III: Professional knowledge

Besides savings and workforce, herding also requires a lot of experience and knowledge. On the one hand, a herder must know the different types of pastures and plants and how to move a herd around. In her study on pastoral knowledge systems, Meierhans (2008) shows that herders' decisions are usually informed by numerous ecological factors (see also 10.4.2). On the other hand, a herder must know how to protect a flock, and must be able to treat sick animals, since veterinarians hardly ever visit the *jailoo*.

> "I know quite a lot about livestock. I know all the different types of sheep, and I also know how to treat the animals. When I was working as a herder, the veterinarians taught me how to treat them." (Herder, large farmer, Jergetal) [1c23]

This is why many of those who herd now used to herd for the kolkhoz or learnt to do so from their parents. For others, becoming a herder from scratch has become all the more difficult because competition among herding households has certainly not decreased in recent years. Some livestock owners will only entrust their animals to former kolkhoz herders, and a herder who loses too many animals during the summer will inevitably lose his paying customers once the *jailoo* season is over.

Unfortunately, the Kyrgyz state has done nothing so far to improve herders' professional knowledge. The recent modernization of agricultural vocational schools' curricula has been limited to land cultivation and marketing, while pasture use and management have been neglected[131]. Thus, the vast array of pastoral knowledge is still predominantly reproduced within herding households and families – but hardly ever shared with others.

[130] The discussion was noted down; it is not a transcript of an audio recording.
[131] Personal communication with the director of the At-Bashy agricultural vocational school, 21 Sept 2006.

10.2.3 Herding as a negotiation process: setting herding fees

Making a living from herding does not only require the right assets; herding as a livelihood strategy also involves negotiating with clients, other herders and state authorities about terms and procedures. A central event in regulating pasture use locally is *tülöö*, a traditional village meeting that takes place in April each year. On the one hand, *tülöö* is a religious feast, where people from the whole village gather near the local mosque to sacrifice animals and express their gratitude if the past year was a good one or to pray for more rain and for people's health and happiness if things have not gone so well. On the other hand, *tülöö* is also the most important formal and regularly held meeting between communal authorities (head of *ayil okmotu*, *ayil kengesh* representatives), village heads (*ayil bas'chy*) and local (male) citizens to discuss and agree upon the terms and conditions for herding animals during summer. Besides, the meeting also serves to assign someone to guard and protect the arable land from trespassers over the summer. The prices that herders can charge for different types of animals are often one of the most important topics of discussion. The head of *ayil okmotu* announces the monthly herding fees for sheep, goats and cows, which have been defined in a *ayil kengesh* session prior to *tülöö,* and by which all herders are asked to abide. According to the head of *ayil okmotu* in Jergetal, members of the *ayil kengesh* talk to different herders and livestock owners before taking a decision on the fees. During *tülöö*, people are then invited again to comment and discuss. Needless to say, herders often try to raise prices, while non-herders prefer to keep them low. Neighboring villages often have different fees, which can lead to fierce discussions during a *tülöö*. The following example dates from 20 April 2009, when the people of Kyzyl-Tuu met for their annual *tülöö* and discussed the herding fees for the next summer season. The chairman of the *rayon kengesh* attended the meeting as a guest[132].

Herder: "About the herding fees for cows – I don't agree."

Head of *ayil okmotu*: "What's unclear about them? People have to pay 80 Som per month, plus 5 Som per cow and season as [new] pasture taxes."

Herder: "Some people herd their animals for 100 Som per month. If the fees in Kyzyl-Tuu and Karabulung [the second-largest village of Kyzyl-Tuu *ayil okmotu*] were the same, things would be fine."

Chairman of *rayon kengesh*: "If someone's not satisfied, he's free to take his animals back."

Herder: "If the *ayil okmotu* decides accordingly, I'll herd cows for 100 Som."

A man: "But no decision has yet been taken."

Another man: "We should agree on 80 Som per cow; otherwise, the herders will have to pay the pasture tax themselves."

Head of *ayil okmotu*: "Okay then, we'll set a monthly fee 80 Som per cow! If someone wants to pay 100 Som per cow, that's up to him."

A man: "Why 80 Som!? I thought we agreed on 70 Som?" [70 KGS was the official cow-herding fee in 2007.]

Another man: "We should agree on a price and pay the pasture tax ourselves."

Chairman of *rayon kengesh*: "Who wants to herd cows!?"

Herder: "Me. Shall we agree on 90 Som?"

Another man: "You can also live from 80 Som!"

Head of *ayil okmotu*: "Okay, this is how we'll do it: 80 Som per cow, 15 Som per sheep and 30 Som for rams."

Herder: [Not satisfied, grumbles]

Head of *ayil okmotu*: "If you don't herd the animals for this price, someone else will. Who agrees? [People raise their hands, and the suggestion of the head of *ayil okmotu* gets a majority vote.] Fine, now let's talk about irrigation."

[132] The discussion was noted down; it is not a transcript of an audio recording.

In this case, the head of *ayil okmotu* successfully defended his position, although he mentioned himself that herders may ask for higher prices if they can find clients willing to pay more. One participant at the 2008 *tülöö* in Jergetal even reported that the head of *ayil okmotu* had to threaten herders with a new 4% tax on livestock if they did not accept his price proposal[133]. Apparently, though, many herders nevertheless seem able to charge higher fees. As a matter of fact, only part of the local population participates in *tülöö*, and not all herders accept and apply the herding fees agreed upon during the meeting.

> "Not all herders participate in this meeting [*tülöö*]. It is mainly older people that participate. The herders decide; they meet each other when they are herding the livestock. The price for herding didn't use to be high, but now it has increased because the prices for products are high." (Herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [KT 5a7]

It thus seems that the *ayil kengesh*, the head of *ayil okmotu* and the *tülöö* can only set some sort of lower price limit, while many herders use less formalized ways to agree on herding fees they consider appropriate. Herders often complain that the official fees are too low to make a living, and that the *ayil okmotu* does not take sufficient account of constantly rising living costs. In the *tülöö* cited above, for instance, *ayil kengesh* and *ayil okmotu* set the official sheep fee for summer 2009 at the same level (15 KGS; US $0.3) as the summer 2008 fee (compare Table 10.3). Needless to say, herders would like to earn more than a year ago, since most commodity prices have not decreased since then. Asked whether he intended to take action against the herders who had raised the officially defined fees from 12 to 15 KGS for sheep, and from 80 to 100 KGS for cows, the head of Jergetal *ayil okmotu* replied:

> "You can't do a lot about that. Market prices are high right now, life is expensive." (Head of Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, 29 Aug 2008)

In addition, many herders perceive the officially defined price as not having been set democratically by the *tülöö*, but as an order from the *ayil okmotu*. They openly question the legitimacy of their communal authorities to regulate the herding fees. Many argue that setting prices was the herders' own business, and complain that defining such inappropriate fees was all their *ayil okmotu* did for them.

> "If somebody came to me and said 12 som [per sheep], and [argued] that this was the prize the *ayil okmotu* decided upon, I would ask him to go to the *ayil okmotu* and give his livestock to them, at 12 som per sheep. Because they [the *ayil okmotu*)] won't help me cover *my* expenses." (Herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a23]

> "The *ayil okmotu* does not have any influence upon the herding fees. We do not receive anything from the *ayil okmotu*, we do not even need them – they only waste money." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, Kumbel *jailoo*) [#032]

It seems that more experienced and better-known herders have more influence over fees than younger ones. One comparably wealthy herder from Jergetal said that, irrespective of the decision taken at *tülöö*, the more experienced herders would decide on the herding fees and the younger and less experienced herders would then adopt them. However, despite such formal and informal price agreements, individual herders still have some room for maneuver. While the fee for sheep and goats only vary by one or two *Som*, there is considerable room for negotiation in fees for cows. On the subject of sheep and goats, one herder from Jergetal stressed how important it is that no herder works for less than the fixed fee, since that would inevitably cause trouble with others. Asked about the differences of cow fees, he replies:

[133] Personal communication with the Jergetal TPS leader, 28 Aug 2008.

> "Well, there are adult cows, calves and young cows. (…) So we bargain, just like at the bazaar. If you want to buy a kilogram of pears, and they cost 60 Som, you start to bargain and then buy them for 55 Som. That's exactly how it works here. If I say 70, people start bargaining and we agree on a price which is good for both parties." (Herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [4a39b]

Interviews with different herders during and after the 2007 and 2008 *jailoo* seasons revealed that there were price differences, but they were moderate. Among those herders who work for several different customers, price differences are usually small and concern mainly herding fees for cows (Table 10.3).

Table 10.3 Actual monthly herding fees in KGS per animal of herders with several paying customers, summer 2007 and 2008 (own survey)

	Jergetal		Kyzyl-Tuu	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Sheep	10-12	12-15	10	15
Goats	15	12-18	10-12	15-16
Cows	50-60	100	50-100	65-70
Horses	0	100*	n/n	70*
Yaks	n/n	n/n	n/n	70

** Horses are mostly herded for free, but herders can dispose over the mares' milk*

At a first glance, a price difference of one to two *Som* for sheep and goats may appear negligible. However, given the fact that sheep and goats amount to about half of all animals in the two villages (compare with 5.2.2), a small variation in fees can be crucial to a herding household's budget. For example, a household that looks after 600 sheep for a period of five months can earn 45,000 KGS (US $1,300) at a rate of 15 KGS, but only 36,000 KGS (US $1,040) at a rate of 12 KGS. The difference of 9,000 KGS is equal to about two months of a teacher's salary and is enough to cover all transport costs to and from the *jailoo* (see below).

There is thus evidence of various local approaches to fixing the terms and conditions of herding animals, and it shows that not all actors have the same negotiating power. On the one hand, local state authorities have the right to call public meetings and lead the formal decision-making process about herding fees. On the other hand, however, older and more experienced herders in particular have the necessary means – such as a big enough clientele, authority over younger and less experienced herders – to override formal decisions and define their own conditions. At the same time, however, many herders expect a lot of their local state representatives. They usually argue that it was their *ayil okmotu*'s task to build better roads to the remote summer pastures, repair bridges or support them with veterinary medicine. By doing so, many respondents often directly refer to the head of *ayil okmotu*, whom they expect to use his personal connections to support his village. Keeping these insights in mind, the next section examines how state representatives and herders try to regulate and negotiate access to pastures, which are the second key resource needed to make a living from herding animals after livestock.

10.3 Access to pastures: formal law and the role of state representatives

The Kyrgyz Land Code of 1999 divided all pastures into village-adjacent, intensive and remote pastures, and placed them under the authority of the communal, *rayon* and *oblast* administration. In 2002, additional regulations stipulated that herders had to lease intensive and remote pastures from the state, while communal authorities could

either lease out the village-adjacent pastures, too, or handle them as common property resource (see 4.3.4). Evidence shows, however, that not all intensive and remote pastures by any means are leased out and there is a considerable gap between formal rules on the one hand and the practices of state representatives on the other.

10.3.1 Formal allocation and lease of pastures

Map 10.1 shows the boundaries of village-adjacent, intensive and remote pastures assigned to Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, as well as the pasture area under the authority of the State Agency for Environment and Forestry [Russ. *leskhoz*]. The **village-adjacent pastures** more or less entail the foothills around Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, and reach from 1,850 up to 3,500 m asl. The two areas of **intensive pastures** are located to the north, at altitudes between 2,500 and 3,800 m amsl. Only a small parcel of **remote pastures** is directly accessible from the village. It is located at the southeastern end of Lake *Son-Koel*, between 3,000 and 3,400 m amsl. The reason for this is that most of the remote pastures assigned to Jergetal are located in the *Ak-Say* valley, one of the country's largest summer pastures near the Kyrgyz-Chinese border, and more than 100 km southeast of the village (not on the map). However, the map also shows that in many places, the pastures under the authority of the Naryn ***leskhoz*** often overlap with the intensive pastures assigned to Jergetal *ayil okmotu* (see 10.3.4 below).

Map 10.2 shows the approximate boundaries of the pastures assigned to Karakojun *ayil okmotu*. The exact boundaries could not be identified for two reasons.While the communal authorities do not have a single map of the pastures assigned to them, GosRegistr At-Bashy repeatedly denied access to its map archives. Nevertheless, based on interviews with various herders and local state representatives, it seem clear that the **village-adjacent pastures** of Kyzyl-Tuu are located around the village at an altitude of about 2,300 m amsl. The **intensive pastures** are located around two to three kilometers northwest of the Torugart road (*Botosh*) and around the military check-post on the way to China (*Ak-Beyit, Kurgon Tash*), at altitudes between 2,500 and 3,400 m amsl. Also the **remote pastures** are split in several parts. While some are located at the northern and southern tips of the relatively easily accessible *Arpa* valley, at altitudes between 3,200 and 3,600 m amsl, others are beyond Lake *Chatyr-Koel*, or even further east in the far-off *Ak-Say* valley (not on the map).

According to official figures, only a minority of pasture users in the two case study villages had a valid lease agreement at the time of research (Table 10.4). From the normative perspective of state officials, many herding households thus access and use the intensive and/or the remote pastures illegally, i.e. without the formal consent of the Kyrgyz state, the rightful owner of the pastures.

Table 10.4 Total area of leased pastures in Jergetal and Karakojun *ayil okmotu* (GosRegistr Naryn 2007, GosRegistr At-Bashy 2008)

	Jergetal Ayil Okmotu [2007][a]			**Karakojun Ayil Okmotu** [2008]		
	Total area [ha]	Rented out [ha]	Revenue [KGS][b]	Total area [ha]	Rented out [ha] [c]	Revenue [KGS][b]
Village adjacent	18,140	0	0	16,809	0	0
Intensive	24,179	5,824 (24%)	48,400	17,854	200 (1%)	n/n
Remote	49,278	1,600 (3%)	8,480	35,932	0	0
TOTAL	73,457	7,424 (10%)	56,880	53,786	200 (0.4%)	n/n

[a] *In addition, 4 people from Jergetal lease in a total area of 296.7 ha of pastures from the Naryn leskhoz*
[b] *Expected revenues from pasture lease contracts for 2007/8*
[c] *Since the only lease agreement in Kyzyl-Tuu was concluded informally, estimations of revenues were not available (see below).*

The two case study villages thus reflect the national situation. In 2008, the Kyrgyz Pasture Department estimated that only 12% of all pastures in the country were formally leased out. At the same time, an unknown, yet presumably much larger, share was used without a formal agreement[134]. From this perspective, Naryn *oblast* performed rather well in 2008, when about one third of all pastures were formally leased out, while only 20% of all pastures were used without formal agreement, and the rest was not used at all. However, there are again considerable variations between *rayons*. While the Naryn *rayon* expected pasture revenues of 700,000 KGS (US $16,890) in 2007, At-Bashy *rayon* expected only 20,000 KGS (US $480)[135]. The figures thus suggest considerable disparities in the enforcement of pasture-related rules at communal, *rayon*, and *oblast* level.

10.3.2 Village-adjacent pastures: rules and practices

Village-adjacent pastures have two main functions: first, to graze the animals during the winter, snow cover permitting; second, to graze the few animals that have not been moved to the summer pastures – mainly milking cows and horses used for fieldwork – from spring to autumn (see 10.2.1). As it has legal authority over village-adjacent pastures, the *ayil okmotu* can decide jointly with the *ayil kengesh* about the rules for pasture allocation.

Common or private property?

According to the law, communities have the option of defining village-adjacent pastures as common property and levying a general user fee through the local land tax, or they can lease them out to individual applicants for a defined time period. In the latter case, the lease must be approved and eventually be registered by the Rayon GosResgistr. 90% of the lease revenues go into the local budget, while 10% have to be transferred to GosRegistr as a service fee.

Evidence shows that the communal authorities in the two case study villages handle these powers differently and that local implementation of the pasture legislation varies considerably. In Kyzyl-Tuu, village-adjacent pastures are exclusively handled as common property. The communal authorities do not rent out the pastures to individuals and groups, but levy a lump sum for pasture use, as part of the per-hectare tax on arable land (17 KGS/ha in 2007; compare 9.2.4). In practice, this means that every household with arable land automatically pays for the use of village-adjacent pastures, irrespective of whether the household has any livestock or not and how many animals are grazed for how many days per year. Several respondents – both with and without livestock – complain about this practice, saying that it favors people with large flocks (compare 10.4). Also in Jergetal, the communal land tax includes a lump sum for the village adjacent pastures. Despite that, however, the communal authorities in 1995 began to offer lease agreements of up to 50 ha to individuals with a private *saray* or house on the village adjacent pastures. This way, a large proportion of the village-adjacent pastures became leased to several, mostly wealthy households. Apparently, these lease agreements, of which many were still valid at the time of research, were not officially registered with the Rayon GosRegistr: The agency's official record (compare with Table 10.4 above) for Jergetal lists zero leaseholders and no revenues for the village adjacent pastures. This way, the Jergetal *ayil okmotu* earns twice for the same pastures, since non-leaseholders – even those who have no livestock at all – must pay taxes for pastures that are leased by some of their wealthier neighbors. Needless to say, this has caused discontent among local people.

[134] Personal comunication with Abdymalik Egemberdiev, director of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department, 11 Sept 2008.
[135] Personal communication, Naryn *rayon* pasture expert, 24 May 2007.

> "Now there are people who use the land and people who do not. So we pay the tax twice; for example, those who lease pay, and we [who do not lease] pay. The government has to control this; it should be done by the *ayil okmotu*. So we have many complaints and regrets concerning pastures." (Member of the Jergetal *ayil kengesh*, 21 Oct 2007)

By 2007, the *ayil kengesh* finally realized the increasing imbalance between leaseholders and non-leaseholders, and eventually decided to abolish the lease system for village-adjacent pastures.

> "There were too many people who leased village-adjacent pastures, built a barn and then didn't let others use their territory. (…) The [lease] system turned out to be of little use, so we decided to stop it." (Member of the Jergetal *ayil kengesh*, 9 Nov 2007)

Since then, the communal authorities have begun to refuse to extend expired lease agreements for village-adjacent pastures, allowing only the lease of small parcels for barns and houses (around 0.1 ha).

Regulation of grazing periods

Communal authorities also have the right to regulate grazing periods for village-adjacent pastures. This can be done by issuing binding dates when all animals (except milking cows, sick animals and horses used for transport; compare with 10.2.2) must leave the village-adjacent pastures in spring and when they are allowed to come back in autumn. The communal authorities are also allowed to define sanctions for those who ignore these dates, and can also appoint and hire individuals to guard arable land over the summer to protect the harvest from trespassing.

These dates are fixed separately in the two villages. In Kyzyl Tuu, movement dates are usually defined and communicated by the communal land use specialist. In 2009, herders from Kyzyl-Tuu thus had to leave the village at the latest on 1 May, and were not allowed to return before 25 September. In order to inform herders who did nott participate in the *tülöö*, the land-use specialist usually visits every one of them and gets them to sign a document saying that they are aware of these rules and potential sanctions (i.e. fines), just in case they break them. According to the head of the Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, flock movement dates are usually agreed upon in an *ayil kengesh* session and are then communicated in the annual *tülöö* (compare with 10.2.3). In 2008, the respective dates were set as per 25 May and 25 September. Having realized that many ignored these orders, the *ayil kengesh* also decided to fine not just herding households, but also any truck drivers offering their transport services to herders before 25 September.

10.3.3 Intensive and remote pastures: rules and practices

The Kyrgyz pasture legislation foresees the use of intensive pastures in spring and autumn, i.e. to graze flocks on their way from the village adjacent to the remote pastures and back. Remote pastures are meant to be used in summer, i.e. from early June to late September, depending on how far above sea level they are. The same legislation stipulates that the use of these two types of pastures be based on territorial leases, that have to be obtained by individuals or groups from the *rayon* (for intensive pastures) and the *oblast* (for remote pastures) administration respectively (compare 4.3.4).

Official procedure for the lease of intensive and remote pastures[136]

The formal procedure to obtain a lease contract is more or less the same for both categories of pastures. First, applicants – individuals or groups – must obtain a document from their *ayil okmotu* indicating the exact number of animals they own. With this document they must travel to the *rayon* or *oblast* centre, where they can apply for a particular pasture plot. The responsible official then checks whether the pasture plot asked for is not already leased out to someone else, and calculates how many hectares the lessee is entitled to, given the number and type of livestock indicated on the document issued by the *ayil okmotu*. By law, one sheep entitles its owner to 0.4 ha, one horse to 2.0 ha, and one cow to 2.8 ha of intensive or remote pastures. If the desired plot is available for rent, the applicant must write an official application to the *rayon* or *oblast* land commission. This commission consists of representatives from GosRegistr and other departments at *rayon* or *oblast* level, and it decides about the application. If the decision is positive, the commission can either entitle the responsible *rayon* or *oblast* official to issue the lease contract to the applicant, or it can order a public auction. In the latter case, a public auction is announced and the plot must be granted to the highest bidder.

As soon as a contract is issued, it must be registered with the *rayon* branch of GosRegistr before it becomes legally binding, and the applicant is then ordered to pay the pasture rental fee through a local bank branch. In 2007 and 2008, the annual per-hectare rental fee in Naryn *oblast* was 7.95 KGS (US $0.2). Applicants can usually decide whether they want to pay the full fee at once or in annual installments; most applicants prefer the latter. First-time rental contracts are issued for a term of five years. After that, they can be extended by another ten years, and then again by 49 years[137]. 90% of the lease revenues are then redirected to the budget of the responsible administrative level – either *rayon* or *oblast* – while 10% are transferred to the GosRegistr account.

Rights and responsibilities of lessor and lessee

A lease contract consists of a small map indicating the borders of the leased parcel, plus a written agreement defining the exact location and size of the area, the duration of the lease agreement, and the rights and responsibilities of lessor and lessee. On the side of the lessor – the *rayon* or *oblast* administration – the most important rights and responsibilities include recommending modern pasture use techniques to the lessee, monitoring whether the lessee uses the pastures according to the law, and fining offenders. This means that *rayon* and *oblast* representatives not only have to coordinate the issuing of lease contracts and the collection of revenues, they also need to monitor the actual use of pastures.

Lessees are not only entitled to use the leased pasture plot for grazing but also to construct barns or other small buildings on the leased plot (which is again subject to a special application process, see 10.4.5). At the same time, lessees are obliged to prevent pasture degradation on the leased plot and respect certain pasture-use rules. These include practising regular pasture rotation, establishing yurts and corrals at least 100 meters from rivers and brooks, and relocating them once in two weeks. In addition, lessees must allow other pasture users to use defined water points or livestock migration routes, and they are not allowed to sub-lease their pasture plot to others. Lease contracts can only be renewed if all these obligations are fulfilled.

On the one hand, the complex procedure requires representatives at all three levels – *ayil okmotu*, *rayon* and *oblast* – to cooperate with each other and to exchange relevant

[136] At the time of research, pasture leasing was only done in Jergetal, not in Kyzyl-Tuu. Therefore, the terms and procedures described here are based on accounts of the Naryn rayon pasture expert gained in several interviews between May 2007 and July 2008.

[137] There are different lease rules and contract durations for non-grazing use, e.g. for tourist operators or hunters. Since no such rental agreements existed for the two villages at the time of research, I shall not discuss them.

information about livestock and pastures. On the other hand, it also demands a high degree of professional expertise from the involved officials. However, evidence shows that what state representatives at the three levels actually do often has very little to do with these formal rules and procedures – or even runs counter to them.

Communal level: Lack of expertise and local re-negotiation of rules

In Jergetal, the communal authorities issue the necessary document if someone wants to apply for a lease contract with the *rayon* or the *oblast*. However, they do not actively encourage people to enter into agreements, although it is obvious that many use the pastures illicitly. At the same time, local expertise about different pasture issues in general and the rental plots in particular appears to be highly limited. Not only was the communal land-use specialist replaced three times during my research for this thesis, but not a single map of the pastures was available at the Jergetal *ayil okmotu*. Therefore, people always have to travel to Naryn to find out whether or not a particular plot is available for rent.

In Kyzyl-Tuu, local expertise does exist in the person of the communal land-use specialist, who has been in charge for many years, but does not have a map either. According to him, the *ayil okmotu* and local people decided in a village meeting in 2004 not to lease out any of the intensive and remote pastures assigned to Kyzyl-Tuu. The open opposition to national pasture legislation arose from a general concern that leasing out pastures would lead to unnecessary conflicts among local pasture users.

> "Before 2004, herders in other villages began to lease pastures, and some people from our *ayil okmotu* wanted to do so too. But most people here didn't agree with that, because they feared that only the rich would get the pastures and would control them in future."
> (Communal land-use specialist, Karakojun *ayil okmotu*, 4 Dec 2007)

It seems however that a lack of financial incentives was another reason for the local resistance to national pasture legislation. Obviously, the *ayil okmotu* was dissatisfied with the division of revenues between *rayon*, *oblast*, GosRegistr and the communal budget, and therefore decided to prevent pasture lease at all. By 2004 the communal authorities therefore stopped issuing application documents. So far, this local 'renegotiation' of nationally defined rules never caused any open conflict with the *rayon* or the *oblast* state administration (which is hardly surprising given the endemic shortage of human resources at these levels). According to the communal land-use specialist, only one person from Kyzyl-Tuu managed to conclude a deal for intensive pastures after 2004, obviously by misinforming the communal authorities (200 ha; compare Table 10.4 above).

Instead, the Karakojun *ayil okmotu* in 2008 started to regulate the rotation between intensive and remote summer pastures. The reason for this was that many herders spent the whole summer season on the intensive pastures, but did not move on to the remote summer pastures of *Arpa* or *Ak-Say*. In view of this apparent under-utilization of remote pastures, the *ayil okmotu* feared that people from other villages might occupy and lease the pastures initially assigned to Kyzyl-Tuu. In spring 2008, the *ayil okmotu* therefore issued an order saying that herders must move directly to *Arpa* in early summer and are not allowed to return to the intensive pastures before 15 August. In order to enforce this order, the *ayil okmotu* appointed one elderly herder to stay on the intensive pastures and guard them against trespassers from Kyzyl-Tuu and other villages. In addition, and in order to increase his credibility, the head of *ayil okmotu* even convinced his own parents – experienced and well-respected former kolkhoz herders – to move further away than usual and thus to serve as an example to others. By contrast, the Jergetal *ayil omotu* did not issue any comparable regulations.

Oblast and rayon level: Lack of means to enforce the law

Given that Naryn *oblast* contains about 2.6 million ha of pastures and more than 268,000 inhabitants (compare Table 5.1), the *rayon* and *oblast* representatives require

considerable human and financial resources to carry out their tasks. However, these are hardly ever provided by the responsible authorities. At *oblast* level, the *oblast* branch of the Kyrgyz Ministry for Agriculture, Water and Processing Industries (MAWPRI) is responsible for pastures although it apparently suffers from a lack of workforce to meet all its tasks and responsibilities.

> "There are just three of us in our department here,– but we'd need about twenty of us!" (Director of MAWPRI in Naryn *oblast*, 24 Sept 2007)

The same goes for the At-Bashy r*a*yon state administration, where three MAWPRI representatives cannot handle the many tasks assigned to them and eventually lose sight of the pasture allocation procedure[138]. This is also why there are hardly ever any public auctions for pasture lots. Both at *oblast* level and in At-Bashy *rayon*, sole responsibility for the pasture rental process thus rests with the respective GosRegistr branches.

By contrast, the Naryn *rayon* state administration in the early noughties hired an expert from the Kyrgyz Pasture Department. The senior expert, who used to wor for the State Pasture Department of the Kyrgyz SSR, has its own office in the *rayon* administration building, where he receives applicants and drafts pasture lease contracts. However, drafting contracts is all he can do, as he has no car and no budget to pay for public transport.

> "In Soviet times, every officer had an own car to visit the pastures and get an impression of the real situation. Today, I don't have a car, so all I can do is to check whether or not the applicants regularly pay their rental fees. I try my best to go to the pastures, but it is impossible for me to visit remote places." (Naryn *rayon* pasture expert, 24 May 2007)

According to the deputy director of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department, there is only one car for the whole Department, and it is at the disposal of the director in Bishkek[139]. As well as lacking a car, the expert also has no proper map of all the pastures within his jurisdiction. In order to check whether an area has already been leased out or not, he must go to the local branch of GosRegistr where all pasture maps and cadastres are stored. It is therefore no surprise that he expresses general discontentment at his working conditions. He blames not only the Kyrgyz Pasture Department for a lack of interest and support, but also the communal authorities for their disinterest in motivating people to use pastures in accordance with the law. As things are now, he more or less depends on people's own motivation to come to Naryn and sign a contract. He therefore assumes that only comparatively wealthy people with large private flocks would come to lease pastures, while herders with small flocks would hardly ever sign a contract (compare with 10.4 below). Similarly, he only learns about pasture-related conflicts if people come to Naryn to report them and complain. As a result, sanctions against offenders are the exception rather than the rule. Consequently, most of the interaction between local pasture users and the authorities in Naryn *rayon* takes place at a tiny desk in a gloomy office in the *oblast* capital, remote from what is going on in the villages and even further from the remote summer pastures. From this perspective, the revenues the Naryn *rayon* pasture expert collected for the intensive and remote pastures of Jergetal *ayil okmotu* in 2007 appear rather remarkable (see Table 10.4 above).

Leskhoz: defining specific rules and procedures

The State Agency for Environment and Forestry [Russ. *leskhoz*], which governs 79,000 ha of intensive pastures in Naryn *rayon*, follows a slightly different procedure and offers different terms than the *rayon* and *oblast* administrations. The *leskhoz* leases out intensive pastures at an annual price of 13 KGS/ha (US $0.4), which is nearly twice the amount charged by the *rayon*. In return, it offers a 49-year contract extension at the

[138] Personal communication with a MAWPRI representative in At-Bashy *rayon*, 5 Dec 2007.
[139] Personal communication, 8 May 2007.

end of only five years. 70% of the revenues stay at the *leskhoz*, while 25% are passed on to the *rayon* state administration, and 5% paid into the account of the *rayon* GosRegistr[140].

All in all, there is evidence that, in most cases, the *ayil okmotu*, *rayon* and *oblast* level have neither the necessary human capital nor the requisite expertise to carry out the highly demanding process of pasture allocation properly. In addition, the communal authorities of Kyzyl-Tuu decided to ignore the pasture legislation. The result is often a striking discrepancy between *de jure* (the pasture legislation) and *de facto* (the actual practices of the involved state actors), and this has been highlighted in other studies (cf. Undeland 2005; Liechti and Biber-Klemm, 2008). As the next section shows, it would however be wrong to ascribe this discrepancy purely to the behavior of state representatives.

10.4 Access to pastures: herders' practices

The fact that some herders are ready to pay for a formal pasture lease contract while others are not indicates that not all herding households share the same opinion of how pastures should be used and managed. Instead, evidence from the two case study villages points to a variety of alternative, often locally specific, and sometimes conflicting practices by which herding households gain and defend their access to pastures. In many cases, these practices incorporate and combine both formal and informal institutions and organizations.

10.4.1 Actual pasture use in the two case study villages

Along with the official pasture boundaries, Maps 10.1 and 10.2 also show the location of yurts in summer 2008, as well as the location of barns [Kyrg. *saray*] on the village-adjacent and intensive pastures. Two things are striking in the case of Jergetal (Map 10.1). First, there are lots of *sarays* on the intensive pastures of *Tektyr Saz*, *Teshik* and *Akai*, large sections of which are leased to different individuals. This is also the area around which most pasture-related conflicts have arisen in recent years (see 10.5). Second, many herding households have established their yurt on the *Kumbel jailoo*, which is not included in the pasture categories formally allocated to Jergetal. Instead, it belongs to the *GosSemSapaz*, a state land fund under the direct authority of the *rayon* administration (compare with 4.3.4). According to the Naryn *rayon* pasture expert, *Kumbel* was originally assigned to the Jergetal *ayil okmotu* but was not used by local citizens after 1991, so the Naryn rayon administration eventually re-allocated it to the neighboring Kochkor *rayon* until 2027. It seems, however, that Kochkor never exercised its user rights, so herders from Jergetal began to occupy the *jailoo* in the late 1990s. Interestingly, *Kumbel* is the same place where the mining company started its operations in 2007 (compare with 5.1.2). According to various respondents, two to three households from Jergetal moved to the remote pastures near Lake *Son Koel* in summer 2008, while one household has been living in a *saray* on the remote *Ak-Say* pastures.

The discrepancy between formal and user-defined categories is less apparent in Kyzyl-Tuu than in Jergetal. There are several barns both on the village adjacent pastures and on the intensive pastures around *Botosh*. In summer 2008, many herding households established their yurt on the remote pastures of *Sö'ök*, *Kuzkhon Tash* and *Kyzyl Döbö*, all located in the southeast of *Arpa* valley. Only a few households remain on the intensive pastures along the main road, either near the military check-post of *Kurgon*

[140] Personal communication with Azamat Sabyrbekov, representative of the State Agency for Environment and Forestry, Naryn *rayon*, 16 Nov 2007.

Tash or further north in a place called *Ak Beyit*. According to various respondents, two other herding households have established their yurt on the remote pastures near Lake *Chatyr Koel*, while six others moved to the northern part of *Arpa* valley. According to the communal land-use specialist, only one household moved to the remote *Ak-Say* pastures in summer 2008.

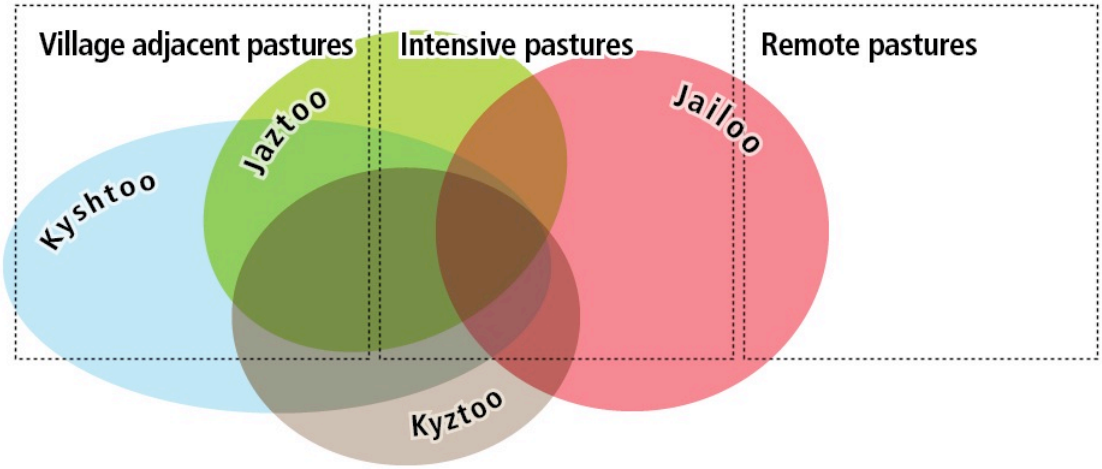
Multiple, overlapping pasture categories

The two maps show a striking discrepancy between the formally defined pasture categories (compare 10.3.1) and actual pasture-use patterns. This discrepancy is also reflected in the terminology used by different actors. The formal division into village-adjacent, intensive and remote pastures is a static one, with defined boundaries and clearly assigned rights and responsibilities for different state authorities. By contrast, most local people distinguish pastures by the way they actually use them, i.e. by the season their animals graze them: *Kyshtoo* [Kyrg. 'winter pastures'], *jaztoo* ['spring pastures'], *jailoo* ['summer pastures'], and *kyztoo* ['autumn pastures'].

For a herder, *jailoo* is thus where he spends summer with his flock, irrespective of whether or not the administration has declared it a remote pasture and plans it to be used during the summer. Similarly, *kyshtoo* is where animals graze during winter, be it on village-adjacent or intensive pastures. This also means that the herders' mental appropriation of pastures does not fit the rules and regulations related to these territories (Liechti and Biber-Klemm 2008). Consequently, many herders not only ignore the formal designation of certain pasture categories for seasonal use (compare with Table 4.2), but also ignore the legally defined need to lease intensive and remote pastures from the state. In addition, the mismatch between formal and user-defined categories can cause considerable confusion and often leads to misunderstandings and dissent between herders and state representatives.

However, since every herder has his own definition of what he considers a *kyshtoo* or a *jailoo*, even herders from the same village have different ideas. While one herder may use a certain place in spring and therefore call it a *jaztoo*, another herder may use it in summer and call it a *jailoo*. This means that the boundaries of the user-defined categories not only differ from the formal pasture categories, they often overlap and are highly volatile (Figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2 Administrative and user-defined categories of pasture overlap (own sketch)



Thus, again, the herders' mental appropriation of pastures does not necessarily match the usually unwritten rules and regulations governing these user-defined categories. As a result, even herders from the same village do not always agree on the 'proper' use of a certain place. Since the user-defined categories refer to seasonal use, most quarrels

arise over seasonal flock movement patterns. Yet, before I describe existing disputes among herders in more detail (10.4.6), I ask how herders and their households select certain pastures for seasonal use. I do so because understanding such selection processes can give us a better understanding of the various differences of definition and opinion among herders, as well as those between herders and state representatives.

10.4.2 Pasture selection criteria of herders

Evidence shows that herding households select pastures according to a set of economic, ecological, social and institutional criteria that cannot always be neatly separated (see also Meierhans 2008).

Economic criteria

Herding is a predominantly economic activity that can help to secure the livelihoods of a whole household or even a family (compare with 10.2.2). Thus, economic considerations strongly determine what a herder thinks is an appropriate place to stay. A herding household's revenues are mainly derived from herding fees (if they herd for others) and from the increased value of livestock fattened on the summer pastures. In addition, the marketing of pastoral products such as *kymyz* or *süzmö* represents another important source of income during the summer. Market access is therefore an important pasture selection criteria for many.

A common way of selling pastoral products is through traveling traders. Traders visit the herders once or twice a week to buy milk products in exchange for fruit, tea, cigarettes and alcohol. They usually go to places where there are many yurts close to each other; they will not visit a household that settles a long way from the others. This is why many herders from Kyzyl-Tuu raised their concerns in 2008 when their *ayil okmotu* ordered them to move further away to *Arpa* valley. Many would have preferred to stay on the intensive pastures along the Torugart road (around *Ak-Beyit* and *Kurgon Tash*), where products could be easily sold to traders and truck drivers. Eventually, however, a sufficient number of herding households obeyed the order and moved away to Arpa, and one of the traders decided to follow them. The lady now visits Arpa once a week with a car and a small trailer to buy *kymyz* at 5 KGS/l and *süzmö* at 3 KGS/kg. In mid-summer, some herding households can sell up to 100 liters of *kymyz* and around 40 kg of *süzmö* every week, earning up to 620 KGS per week (US $15).

Traveling traders also visit the *Kumbel* summer pastures. However, since the *jailoo* is not far from the Naryn-Bishkek road, many herders regularly ride to *Kyrk Bozüi*, a place where a dozen small traders live in yurts and old caravans (compare with Map 10.1).

> "The best thing about *Ichke-Suu* [a part of *Kumbel jailoo*] is that (…) it is close to the main road." (Herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [3a15]

On *Kumbel jailoo*, some herding households have also begun to sell their milk products to the mining company that started open-cast mining in 2007. Since the mining company usually offers one or two *Som* more than traders, households living close to the mine's headquarter much prefer to sell there.

Besides optimizing their income, herders also try to minimize expenses. One of the main expenses during a *jailoo* season is transport to and from the pastures. While herders usually drive the animals to the summer pastures in one or two days, the rest of the household – women and children, yurt, tents, food items, and various tools – is transported by truck or tractor. Since only a few households have their own means of transport, most of them are obliged to hire a driver with a truck. But fuel must be paid for extra, and the state of the roads and bridges usually deteriorates the farther they

are from the village. Thus, the difference between intensive and remote pastures is not least a financial one, which is also why many of the households who first moved to *Arpa jailoo* in 2008 complained about the excessive transport costs. Hence, covering long distances to remote summer pastures such as *Ak-Say* is only profitable for herding household with large flocks.

> "Simple people can't go there [*Ak-Say*] because the transport costs are far too high. (…) You can't go there with 50 or 60 sheep – it's just not profitable." (Farmer during *tülöö*, Kyzyl-Tuu, 20 Apr 2009)

In order to save transport costs, many households with a private *saray* on the intensive pastures remain in the vicinity of their *saray* all year round. In Jergetal, this has already caused considerable conflicts (see 10.4.6). Many herders also think that it is up to their *ayil okmotu* to regulate transport to and from remote pastures better and to improve the roads and bridges – a discussion which has gained particular attention in conjunction with the highly controversial new pasture law and taxes (compare 10.5).

Ecological criteria

Economic considerations cannot be separated from ecological criteria. Most herders want the animals to stay healthy and to fatten quickly so that they can satisfy their paying customers or employer and can sell their own animals at a good price. This is why herders follow a set of criteria to find 'good' pastures.

Most herders agree that a 'good' pasture area is characterized by the availability of water. Enough water means good vegetation, and proximity to a spring, river or brook reduces the time needed to provide humans and animals with drinking water. In the semiarid Naryn *oblast*, however, water-abundant places are scarce and few rivers and brooks run throughout the year. Places with sufficient water may dry up from one year to the next, depending on the weather and temperatures.

> "Before we used to stay near *Kumbel[-Suu]*. But suddenly the water disappeared because of the drought." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, *Kumbel jailoo*) [#031]

Lack of water is one of the main reasons for a herding household looking for a new place to put up its yurt. The availability of water also determines the type of vegetation in a given place. Meierhans (2008, 69) shows that most herders know clearly where what kind of plants are to be found and that they are usually aware of the complex dynamics between vegetation cover, stocking densities and other environmental aspects. Another important criterion is topography. In early summer, herders usually drive their flocks to sunny places [Kyrg. *küngöy*] where the grass ripens earlier. Towards autumn, when the sunny slopes dry out and the grass turns yellow, they prefer shady hillsides [Kyrg. *teskey*]. But flat areas are also welcome, since they make it easier to guard the flocks.

> "There is water here, it is flat, and we can see the animals even if we are having a break." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, *Arpa jailoo*) [#010]

Since most herding households prefer not to relocate their yurt during the summer, they try to put up their yurt in a place from where herders can reach both *küngöy* and *teskey* slopes, but also plain pastures. As a result, many establish their yurts at the intersection of plains and steep slopes. Herders from Kyzyl-Tuu thus prefer places like *Kuzkhon Tash* and *Sö'ök* at the foot of the *Torugart* range, while most herders from Jergetal spend the summer just below the *Kumbel* range (compare Maps 10.1 and 10.2).

Other ecological criteria include the local climate and weather conditions. People and animals do not like it if a place is too windy, and some animals are better suited to the cold than others. Cows in particular do not like the cold weather and often run back to

the lowlands, while yaks need to stay at high altitude all year round. Herders thus often refer to their animals' habits when arguing in favor or against a certain place. A herder from Kyzyl-Tuu who was forced by the *ayil okmotu* to move to the remote Arpa pastures at 3,500 m altitude said:

> "We will stay in *Ak-Beyit* again in 2009. It is too cold up here and the animals don't like the place." (Herder, large farmer, *Arpa jailoo*) [#001]

Last but not least, the large flocks, often containing up to 600 animals, need sufficient room to graze. If the same area is used by too many herders, the vegetation cover starts to deteriorate. In addition, the risk of mixing different herds is greater. Although most herders say that the *jailoos* are large enough for everybody, increased competition for pasture resources has nevertheless prompted several of them to move in recent years.

> "First we were alone, but then more and more people came. The same happened in both places – and it is the same here. We would like to have a valley for our own. The fodder already gets scarce here." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, *Kumbel jailoo*) [#032]

The slowly increasing competition on the remote summer pastures has not yet resulted in any open conflicts among herders. In most cases, common law ensures that herding households that have been coming to the same place for many years or even generations are not directly challenged by others. Nevertheless, 'newcomers' who put up their yurt a few hundred meters away may cause discontent and tension.

Social criteria

Although a household's motivation to herd may be first and foremost to secure its livelihoods, herding is also an important social practice. The *jailoo* is not only associated with fresh air, pure nature and healthy food, but also with mutual help among neighbors, large gatherings and joyous feasts, i.e. the reproduction of social relations (Liechti 2008). Many herders and their household members repeatedly affirm the importance of having good neighbors and that people have to be able to rely on each other to make a living on the summer pastures. That is why two to three yurts are often established in sight of each other so that visiting is easy. Neighborhood is therefore a central criteria when selecting a pasture. In many cases, neighbors on the *jailoo* are also neighbors in the village; they know and trust each other, and many share transport to and from the *jailoo*.

> "In *Bel-Kara-Suu* [intensive pastures] there are too many people and the road is nearby, so there is more thieving. On *Arpa* nobody steals animals; there are hardly any strangers here." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, Arpa *jailoo*) [#003]

Stealing is not the only reason why most herding households stress the importance of good and reliable neighbors. A group of four to five neighboring yurts usually practices *sherine*, i.e. one or two rounds of reciprocal invitations to dinner[141]. These are usually combined with a *tschornaya kassa* [Russ. 'black cashbox'], i.e. a revolving fund (compare with 9.3.4). Neighborhood on the *jailoo* is thus closely related to monetary exchange and temporary financial dependencies, and requires a high degree of trust among neighbors. All in all, neighborhood seems to be a far more important point of reference for many herding households than tribal affiliation [Kyrg. *uruu*]. All respondents assured me that the selection of pastures has nothing to do with tribes and that people did not mind which *uruu* their *jailoo* neighbors belonged to. The apparently random distribution of *uruus* on the summer pastures backs up the conclusion that tribes and their local leaders [Kyrg. *uruu bas'chy*] have no influence on how people access pastures.

[141] There is no literal translation of the Kyrgyz word *sherine*. According to Karataev and Eraliev (2000, 508), *sherine* is an old Kyrgyz tradition already practised during pre-colonial tribal meetings.

On the contrary, family and household strongly determine where a herder and his household spend the summer. The cildren of former kolkhoz herders often use the same place as their parents and so certain *jailoo* neighborhoods are reproduced over two or more generations. Consequently, seasonal migration patterns and the location of the yurt hardly ever change, even if brothers or close relatives and their households take over from each other on the *jailoo*.

> "We have been coming here for the last eight years. Before that, my parents-in-law had used the same place since 1991. People always go to the same place out of habit." (Herder's wife, large farmer, Arpa *jailoo*) [#002]

Thus, contemporary seasonal migration patterns often reproduce pasture use practices from Soviet times, as children do as their parents did when the centrally planned rotational grazing schemes of the kolkhoz were still in place. On *Arpa jailoo*, several of the 20 herding households put up their yurt on the very same spot that their parents in socialist times. The exception are herders who work for a single employer – he usually tells them where they have to go, e.g. because he leased in a particular pasture lot.

Institutional criteria

Last but not least, herding households must also come to terms with a set of institutional constraints. One of them is the formal requirement laid down in the pasture legislation that there be a lease contract; this will be discussed in more detail below. Other institutional constraints include for instance recent attempts by the communal authorities in Kyzyl-Tuu to regulate flock movements between the village-adjacent, intensive and remote pastures. Given that most herding households stayed on *Arpa jailoo* in summer 2008, this communal measure appears to have been rather effective.

> "We only came to Arpa because the *ayil okmotu* told us to; otherwise we would have spent summer on *Botosh* [intensive pastures] again." (Herder, Arpa *jailoo*) [#014]

Most herders I met in summer 2008 accepted the new communal regulations. Nevertheless, many complained that their animals were not used to spending long periods at high altitude, saying that it was difficult to prevent sheep and cows moving down before mid-August. In addition, many complained that moving further away caused much higher transport costs, but that the *ayil okmotu* did not care about that. In the course of a group discussion with several herders on *Arpa jailoo*, many therefore said that they would remain on the intensive pastures in 2009, since paying the fines would be less expensive than moving to remote Arpa.

> "Renting a truck up here [to Arpa] costs 7,000 *Som* – one way. So it's better to stay down there [on the intensive pastures] and pay the fine. Transport to *Ak-Beyit* costs only 3,000 *Som*. So the fine does not even represent the difference." (Herder, Arpa *jailoo*, group discussion, 7 Aug 2008)

Nevertheless, only one herder ignored the *ayil okmotu*'s order and set up his yurt on the intensive pastures near *Kurgon-Tash* (compare with Map 10.2)[142]. Interestingly, the elder herder appointed as a guard by the *ayil okmotu* did not take any action against him, but focused on trespassing animals from other villages instead. When in mid-July the head of *ayil okmotu* and the *oblast* governor came to see whether people were abiding by the rules, the guilty herder quickly moved further away – only to return a few days later. In the end, no fines were imposed in 2008. In Jergetal, the communal authorities only issued movement dates, but no spatial restrictions on flocks. Nevertheless, many herders were not aware of the exact movement dates, and several of them were unaware that the *ayil okmotu* had announced anything at all.

[142] The other two yurts near *Kurgon-Tash* belong to the appointed guard and to an old woman who had received permission to stay on the intensive pasture for health reasons. Another yurt near *Ak-Beyit* belongs to a communally appointed herder of rams who was ordered to stay away from the sheep flocks.

> "The *ayil okmotu* does not fix any migration dates, and people decide themselves when they leave. People in the village tell us when the crops have been harvested, and we can also see that ourselves." (Herder, Kumbel *jailoo*) [#035]

Various respondents reported conflicts between farmers and herders when the latter returned too early and caused considerable damage to fields and hay meadows. Yet although the communal rules demand that guilty herders compensate farmers up to 1,000 KGS (US $24) for the damage, it remained unclear whether or not such compensation had been paid in 2008.

10.4.3 The perspective of leaseholders

Despite the importance of other factors in selecting pastures, and the apparent inefficiency and weakness of formal (state) organizations and institutions, herding households have to deal with the legal framework in one way or the other. Although only a minority of pasture users makes formal lease contracts, most herding households trade off the advantages of the pasture lease system against its disadvantages. In addition, they also comment on other people's practices[143].

Village-adjacent pastures

While most lease agreements in Jergetal concern intensive pastures (see below), a number of people also lease village-adjacent pastures. However, since the communal land-use specialist had no respective list, the exact number of such agreements could not be determined. This confirms the impression expressed above that these agreements were concluded illicitly and without the involvement of the Naryn *rayon* GosRegistr as formally required. Apparently, most agreements for village-adjacent pastures were concluded around the year 2000. According to a local councilor, most leaseholders of village adjacent pastures have their own comparatively large flock and/or private barn or small house in the vicinity of the village[144]. It seems that their motivation for concluding a lease agreement – despite their guaranteed right to use village pastures along with others – was to secure their long-term access to sufficient winter forage for their ever increasing number of livestock. Thus, the lease of village-adjacent pastures in Jergetal appears to be closely linked to problems of arable land use. As I have shown in Chapter 9, private arable land is often scattered and thus difficult to cultivate. At the same time, neighbors and relatives hardly ever lease or sell their unused land, while the arable land in the communal Land Redistribution Fund (LRF) is also far from the village. Thus, leasing village-adjacent pastures is an alternative for those who want to secure their fodder needs on their own without having to buy expensive additional fodder.

> "0.89 ha of [arable] land is not sufficient to prepare fodder, so I decided to rent some pastures and graze my livestock there. It is better to rent pastures; I live there [in the *saray*] in the winter and the summer. (…) There are just a few people leasing out their [arable] land. And if you rent [arable] land, it is quite far from here. It's very difficult, so it is better to rent pastures. And if you rent arable land you have to pay rent, and you never know whether or not the barley will grow; you cannot rely on the weather. And in autumn, before the harvest, the animals graze [on the fields]." (Herder, smallholder, Jergetal) [1b10]

According to this respondent, farming arable land is much too difficult and risky, whereas leasing pastures does not involve as many imponderables. By contrast, another livestock owner, who concluded a contract over 50 ha of village-adjacent pastures around his *saray* near *Baskyia* (compare Map 7.1) in 2003, said that he made the agreement 'just in case' and also because his neighbors did the same. Nevertheless, the

[143] As the lease of all types of pastures has been suppressed in Kyzyl-Tuu since 2004, the leaseholders' perspective presented in this section relies on evidence from Jergetal.
[144] Personal communication, 9 Nov 2007.

fact that most leaseholders lease pastures around an already existing *saray* or start to build one as soon as the contract is signed indicates that leasing village-adjacent pastures is often part of a long-term livelihood strategy. The contract and the building alike help to secure access to forage, which is a key resource if a household wants to further increase its flock size. Interestingly, however, at the time of research none of the current leaseholders of village-adjacent pastures knew yet that the *ayil kengesh* had decided not to extend their contracts.

Intensive pastures

In 2008, there were 43 lease agreements in Jergetal *ayil okmotu* for intensive pastures and the average leasehold was 135 ha. However, since many leaseholders leased several lots and thus concluded more than one contract, the exact number of leaseholders was unclear[145]. In addition, there were at least four lease agreements with the *leskhoz* and the leaseholds were for between 40 and 111 ha. Nearly all of these agreements concern the pastures located halfway between the village and the *Kumbel* pastures, i.e. *Mongoldor*, *Sary Mambet, Teshik*, *Tektyr Saz* and others (see map 10.1). In Soviet times, these places were used as spring and autumn pastures, i.e. as stopovers between the village-adjacent and the remote summer pastures near *Son-Köl*. Several *sarays* remain from that time and have all been privatized since 1991. Most of them are now occupied by households from Jergetal who managed to acquire their relatives' or neighbors' shares in these often small buildings, either by bartering or purchasing them (see 7.2.3). Most of them now reside there from autumn to spring, while others live in their *saray* all year round.

In the late 1990s, most of these households began to lease the pastures around their *saray* to graze their own livestock on them. Due to the overall decrease in livestock numbers following the dissolution of the kolkhoz, competition among pasture users was still moderate at that time. In addition, there were as yet no proper rules for the allocation of pastures, so these early applicants could often lease large pastures of up to 400 ha, which often was (and in most cases still is) far beyond the actual needs of their flocks. For instance, one household with 27 livestock units that has resided in a small house on *Teshik* for the last 20 years still has a contract for 400 ha of intensive pastures – although the official law fixing a household's private livestock entitlement, would only permit it to have 45 ha (compare 10.3.3). Similar cases were reported by the current director of the Jergetal Territorial Body of Public Self-Governance and other respondents. The main reason why most of these households have retained their lease agreements is that the secured access to large areas of intensive pastures allows them to stay in and around their *saray* all year round. Thus, they can save the potentially high cost of spending summer on the *jailoo* (compare 10.4.1).

Other leaseholders concluded their contract only later on, when they noticed there was growing competition for intensive pastures. In 2001, for instance, one herder who grew up in a private *saray* on *Tektyr Saz* suddenly realized that others intended to occupy the intensive pastures around his parents' *saray*, so he quickly signed a contract for 35 ha to secure his own access rights.

> "In 2001 we had to lease the land [the pastures]. That was problematic. Somebody wanted to buy this land. That is why we leased it, so that we would not lose our house. If somebody else would have leased it [the pastures], we would have been forced to move away." (Herder, smallholder, *Tektyr Saz*) [5a1]

As in the case of village-adjacent pastures, most lease agreements for intensive pastures are concluded by mid-sized and large farmers. One reason for this is that concluding a contract generates considerable costs including administrative fees for official documents and repeated trips to meet the *rayon* pasture expert and the GosRegistr specialists in Naryn town. It may also be assumed that applicants must sometimes pay

[145] Personal communication, Naryn *rayon* pasture expert 24 Sep 2009.

bribes to speed up official procedures, outbid other prospective leaseholders or make the issuing of a contract possible at all. In one case in 1998, a herder who applied for 140 ha of intensive pastures presented *rayon* officials with animals in order to outbid a competitor who applied for the same lot[146]. Another herder said he paid his annual rental fee in cash to a unidentified *rayon* representative who visited the pastures once a year – a practice that obviously conflicts with the formal payment procedure described above. At the same time, however, an official list available with GosRegistr Naryn shows that more than 15 leaseholders from Jergetal have not yet paid a single lease fee to the bank since they concluded their contract – some of them already have nine years' worth of arrears. To put it carefully, the existence of informal payments between leaseholders and state representatives may be an important factor.

Remote pastures: hardly any lease agreements

Table 10.4 also shows that only 3% of all remote pastures assigned to Jergetal *ayil okmotu* are leased out. The main reason for this is that only a tiny part of Jergetal's 49,278 ha of remote pastures are located within less than 50 km of the village (on the south-eastern shore of Lake *Son Koel*). The rest is located in *Ak-Say* valley close to the Kyrgyz-Chinese border and separated from Jergetal by two high mountain passes, more than 100 km of mostly poor roads, and an arduous application procedure for a permit [Russ. *propusk*] to enter the border zone. Seasonal migration to the remote pastures of *Ak-Say* is therefore too expensive for most herding households, which is why only one household from Jergetal lives in *Ak-Say* at all, and all year round. Consequently, most herding households use the easily accessible intensive pastures in *Kumbel* as *jailoo*.

10.4.4 The perspective of non-leaseholders

Apart from the few leaseholders on village-adjacent pastures and the households who reside all the year round in a *saray* on the intensive pastures, most herding households from Jergetal have never so far concluded a pasture lease contract and have thus never paid any lease fees for intensive or remote pastures. Of the 21 households I visited on *Kumbel* in summer 2008, only three said they had a valid lease agreement for the pastures they used. However, none of the other households have ever encountered any problems, although from a normative point of view, they have been using the pastures illegally. In Kyzyl-Tuu, only one household has ever concluded a pasture lease contract, for the reasons detailed above. Thus, experiences with and opinions about the lease system differ considerably between the two villages – and also between individual herders. Analysis shows that there are several reasons why non-leaseholders generally disapprove of the pasture lease system.

First, many herders think that an open-access regime for pastures would be the best solution for the *jailoos*. They argue that there was sufficient space for everyone, and that leasing particular lots would only lead to unnecessary conflicts.

> "It is good to have open access to the pastures. If I leases the pastures, I would not allow others to come onto my pastures, and other people would not be able to use these pasture – and what will they do then?" (Herder, smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a23]

Second, no respondent has ever seen a state representative on the *jailoo* – at least not one who came to check lease contracts. As a result, most people do not feel impelled to conclude a contract to avoid potential sanctions. Consequently – and third – many people argue that concluding a contract would be of no use.

> "Today, nobody is renting pastures anymore – it's only spending money without getting any benefit." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, *Kumbel jailoo*) [#032]

[146] Personal communication with herder's sister, 11 Oct 2007.

The main argument in this case is that, since there is no sanctioning authority around, a contract does not help to prevent others from breaking the rules, i.e. trespassing on a leased pasture lot. As a matter of fact, even those living close to genuine leaseholders do not know the boundaries of their neighbor's pasture lot, nor do they really care.

> "We don't lease pastures, we use them all jointly. Only one household leases, and he reminds us from time to time about that. But we don't care and we put our yurt wherever we want." (Herder, *Kumbel jailoo*) [#037]

Needless to say, this can lead to conflicts between leaseholders and non-leaseholders (see 10.4.6 below). A fourth and oft-heard argument against formal pasture lease is that local people already pay lots of different fees and taxes, including a lump sum for pasture use as part of the land tax. Many therefore complain that the state levies too many fees and taxes and that their moderate incomes do not allow them to pay for pastures, too.

> "No, we don't pay anything. Why pay? We pay money for herding in summer and we pay taxes for land and for the *SozFond* [social fund] and also for electricity." (Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [2f14]

Fifth, some respondents are also convinced that paying the lump sum for pastures entitles them to free access to all types of pastures. In addition, some are convinced that *jailoos* are not leased out anyway, a misunderstanding that points to a communication gap between lawmakers and resource users, as well as between the different levels of the state administration. As shown above (10.3.3), there is often a striking lack of professional expertise at the communal level, and many local authorities are unable to correctly explain the formal pasture lease procedure to potential applicants. Sixth, herders often move to the same places every year, sometimes even reproducing their own or their parents' practices and pasture use patterns from Soviet times (compare 10.4.1).

> "I thought it was a good place for the livestock, and we went there the first year, and then the second year we went to the same place again. (…) So this place has actually been privatized, but without any agreement being made." (Herder, large farmer, *Arpa jailoo*) [1a7]

In this particular case, customary rights – although not passed down for several generations – and the resulting concept of private property are favored over the public system of pasture lease. The example thus illustrates that not all pasture users necessarily share the normative concepts of the lawmaker, i.e. that pastures are in the sole ownership of the state, and that private ownership of pastures is not foreseen.

The herders' arguments against lease contracts thus reflect several different issues. On the one hand it is obvious that the formal system of pasture lease hardly offers any incentive to conclude a contract. Not only is there no sanctioning authority to fine those who ignore the rules, but there is also no one to help leaseholders enforce the property rights they have paid for. On the other hand, people's reluctance to abide by the rules also reflects a general lack of trust in state representatives, whom they consider incapable of handling the collected fees and taxes effectively. Last but not least, herders do not necessarily share the state's concept of property rights over pastures, preferring open-access regimes and/or customary rights instead. Evidence shows that *sarays* play an increasingly important role in these differing concepts of property in both villages.

10.4.5 Constructing a claim: the role of *sarays* for pasture appropriation

In both villages, barns and small houses on the pastures play a central role in securing access to pastures. In Jergetal, these *sarays* are mainly located on the village-adjacent pastures as well as on the intensive pastures of *Tekytr Saz* and *Teshik* (Map 10.1). As discussed above, they play a crucial role in pasture leases, since people often lease a pasture lot close to their *saray*. In Kyzyl-Tuu, there are 36 *sarays* on the village-adjacent and intensive pastures along the Torugart road, plus 15 on the intensive pastures of *Botosh* (Map 10.2). According to the communal land-use specialist in Kyzyl-Tuu, nine *sarays* were built between 2006 and 2008, mostly on the intensive pastures[147]. However, since the Karakojun *ayil okmotu* stopped leasing pasture in 2003, people cannot lease pastures adjacent to their *saray*. Nevertheless, *sarays* have become an important means to secure access to pastures in Kyzyl-Tuu too, in the sense of a constructed, physical claim.

Livestock owners have several good reasons for building a *saray*. On the one hand, having a building on the *kyshtoo* [winter pastures] – be it on village adjacent or intensive pastures – allows them to graze their animals even during the winter. As long as the snow is not too deep, sheep, goats, horses and yaks have no trouble grazing on snow-covered pastures. Only cows need to be fed most of the time during winter since they cannot find the grass below the snow. A *saray* where herders and animals can spend the night thus improves access to winter pastures and potentially helps to reduce a household's expenditure on additional fodder. *Sarays* have become even more profitable after recent price increases for winter fodder (see 9.4). In addition, a *saray* also helps to reduce the workload for herders, because the flocks do not have to be driven between the village and the pastures every day. However, not all *sarays* are equally profitable. Places with running water nearby can basically be used all year round, while a so-called 'dry' *saray* without water can only be used when there has been some snowfall.

After having wrecked most barns and shelters after 1994 (see 7.2.3), more and more people began to realize the economic advantages of having a *saray* when, after 1996, the number of animals and consequently pressure on the village-adjacent pastures started to rise again. Since then, many have tried to acquire the unused shares of other households in old and demolished *sarays* in order to reconstruct them and use them again. However, buying shares and reconstructing a building is very expensive; one respondent estimated the costs for material and workers at around 20,000 KGS (US $483), which is equal to about five months of a teacher's salary. Thus, it is generally wealthier households that can afford to build their own *saray*.

De jure terms and procedures for construction

According to the Kyrgyz Land Code, every individual has the right to build and register one *saray*. Doing so requires an official permit and involves various fees. According to the GosRegistr representatives in Naryn and At-Bashy[148], someone who wants to build a *saray* must lease the land needed for construction. For this, the applicant must first get an official permit from the responsible authority (e.g. the *ayil okmotu* for village-adjacent pastures etc.), which checks the selected location and eventually writes a recommendation letter. This allows the would-be builder to contact the *rayon's* Department of Architecture, which assesses the project again. Step number three is the *rayon's* Department of Ecology, which makes sure that the construction does not affect ecologically sensitive areas. Once all these permits have been issued, GosRegistr registers the *saray* and the respective plot, then collects the service and lease

[147] Personal communication, 1 Aug 2008.
[148] Personal communication, 18 Aug and 2 Sep 2008.

Figure 10.3 Construction of a new *saray* on the intensive pastures of Botosh, Kyzyl-Tuu (photo by the author, 2007)

fee. The service fee is around 1,000 KGS (US $24) per permit. The lease fee is calculated per *sotik* [0.01 ha] of land and ranges from 2,000 to 10,000 KGS/*sotik* (US $48 to 241). Since the fee depends on a plot's geo-botanical qualities, the cheapest way is to build on the remnants of an old kolkhoz *saray*. The land size for construction ranges from 0.05 to 0.15 ha. GosRegistr offers two different models to lease construction land for a *saray*. The first one, referred to as a *red booklet*, grants a 99-year lease after which the plot can be privatized. Such land can also be sold or bequeathed to others, but the lease fee for the whole 99 years must be paid at the beginning. The second model, called the *green booklet*, follows the same time intervals as pasture lease, with contract renewals after 5, 10 and 49 years.

De facto practices

In practice, the service fees for construction permits vary considerably. One farmer from Jergetal said that he paid only 370 KGS (US $9) to Naryn GosRegistr for the permit plus 1,104 KGS (US $27) for a map of the construction site. Another farmer from Kyzyl-Tuu who built a new *saray* on the remnants of an old *semljanka* [Russ. 'earthhouse'; a shelter dug into a hillside] had to pay service fees of 3,000 KGS (US $72) to the Department of Architecture plus 2,500 KGS (US $60) to GosRegistr. However, different fees for similar procedures seem to be daily practice in public administration, and may be related to arbitrary decision-making and nepotism as well as a lack of professionalism among civil servants. From an organizational point of view, it seems more interesting that GosRegistr, the main responsible agency for pasture lease in At-Bashy *rayon*, does not require that applicants lease the intensive pastures around the plot for the *saray*. After all, it seems obvious that someone who builds a *saray* intends to use the adjacent pastures for grazing. The reasons for this are unclear; it may simply be an expression of negligence and a striking lack of communication within GosRegistr regarding the registration of *sarays* and pasture

lease agreements. Anyway, far from all pasture users apply for an official permit when renovating or constructing a *saray*. GosRegistr officials from At-Bashy estimated that 50% of all existing *sarays* were built illegally. They also said that many people would come in to legalize their *saray* after a couple of years because they wanted to use it as security for credit. In this case, offenders are fined 500 to 2,000 KGS (US $12 to 48). In order to extend the grazing period further, some households have also begun to obtain or construct more than one *saray*. This is possible because the law only prohibits individuals for constructing more than one building, not households, so a new *saray* can simply be registered under another household member's name. Besides, the purchase of already existing *sarays* and the land on which they stand is unregulated.

So far, nobody has ever tried to build a *saray* on the *jailoo*. Yet while the communal land-use specialist in Kyzyl-Tuu dismisses this idea as futile, some respondents have already begun to think about this option.

> "In about five years, we may reach the upper limit of animals on the the *kyshtoo*. Maybe then it will become necessary to have a *saray* on the *jailoo*." (Large farmer, Kyzyl-Tuu) [1a18]

The reason why I am looking at these processes in detail is that the purchase of an existing *saray* or the construction of a new one is an important means of gaining access to pastures in a situation where the pasture lease system has either been suppressed by the communal authorities (as in Kyzyl-Tuu) or cannot guarantee secure and exclusive access to pasture resources (as in Jergetal). Even if someone cannot lease the village-adjacent or intensive pastures around a *saray*, the mere presence of a private building on the pastures constitutes a physical claim to the surrounding area, all the more so since customary rights play an important role in access to pastures (compare with 10.4.3). Such claims may present a considerable challenge as soon as the authorities decide to change the 'rules of the game', e.g. through the planned reform of the pasture legislation (see 10.5 below): A household that has invested a lot of money in building a *saray* to use the adjacent winter or spring pastures will hardly agree to move away and let others take its place. This has circumvented the Karakojun *ayil okmotu*'s intention to avoid wealthier people appropriating pastures by suppressing lease contracts; this is because it is mainly wealthy households that have built a *saray* in recent years. Existing *sarays* on the village and intensive pastures of Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu may thus form some kind of precedent and thereby make the implementation of the new pasture legislation a difficult endeavor, all the more so as they have already led to conflicts among pasture users in Jergetal.

10.4.6 Existing conflicts over pastures

Many of the issues described above – the mismatch between formal and user-defined pasture categories, the different criteria of herders for selecting pastures, the controversies between leaseholders and non-leaseholders, and the role of *sarays* in resource appropriation – contain a certain potential for conflict.

Conflicts between leaseholders and non-leaseholders

Open conflicts between state representatives and pasture users are still the exception, since the former are often in a weak position and hardly able to enforce formal rules. Instead, most conflicts have broken out between pasture users themselves, usually over disagreements about intensive pasture use in Jergetal. Since most intensive pastures around Jergetal are currently leased out to households with their own *saray*, it has become difficult for non-leaseholders to use them on their way to and from the *Kumbel* summer pastures. According to the rotational grazing system practised in Soviet times, herders and their flocks would usually spend a few weeks on the *jaztoo* before moving

further to the summer pastures, and would do the same in autumn. However, as things are now, they are only allowed to cross the *jaztoo* but not stay there, since this would violate the leaseholders' exclusive pasture use rights. This is why many non-leaseholders complain about the current situation, since they risk getting into conflict with leaseholders every spring and autumn.

> "There is a problem with the *jaztoo*. Every time we come there in spring, we have to look for a new place for our yurt. Some people have rented the *jaztoos*, and they usually send us away when we put up our yurt on their pastures. However, it is not possible to control the animals and stop them from trespassing others' pastures." (Herder, *Kumbel*) [#037]

The director of the Jergetal TPS who tried to initiate a public debate about pasture use at the local level confirmed that the lack of access to the *jaztoo* is a major problem. He also complained that the communal authorities have done little so far to find a solution and that there was no transparency about the lease agreements concluded with the *rayon* administration.

> "The *jaztoo* is an endless problem. Most of it is on *Tektyr Saz*, where everything is leased out. Nevertheless, the *ayil okmotu* forces people to leave the village on time and move to the *jaztoo*. Unfortunately, we don't exactly know how long some of the lease agreements will be valid." (Director of the Jergetal TPS, 28 Aug 2008)

By contrast, leaseholders blame non-leaseholders for not respecting their legal claims. While they usually invite relatives and friends to graze their flocks for some time on 'their' *jaztoo*, they blame others for overusing the same pastures. Nevertheless, most leaseholders decide not to act against trespassers for different reasons. While some shy away from conflicts in general, others do not know the exact borders of their pasture lot and prefer not to risk a dispute. Yet the majority thinks that the *rayon* administration would not help them anyway.

> "There is trespassing, but you can't do anything about it. The lease contract doesn't help." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [#036]

Others again argue that the pastures are still owned by the state and that it would be up to the respective authorities to monitor and regulate people's access to pastures.

> "I can't say to people 'you mustn't come here', because that's none of my business. This isn't my property. The pastures belong to the state, to the *ayil okmotu*. Sure, there are people like me who use the pastures by contract. (…) [But] there is lawlessness here." (Large farmer, Jergetal) [2d1]

Some leaseholders nevertheless try to defend their rights by writing complaint letters to the rayon. In a few cases, this has resulted in penalties against the trespassers, which are determined according to the number of trespassing animals.

> "We do control things, because we pay money for these pastures. (…) If you don't have an agreement, they [other people] will get the land. We have documents from all levels. (…) Otherwise, anybody would live here." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, Jergetal) [1a4]

Last but not least, there are also leaseholders who do not mind trespassers because they think that there is still sufficient pastureland for everyone. The question then arises why they conclude a lease agreement if they do not insist on the user rights they pay for. The reasons are manifold. While one herder said that he wanted to have some sort of security in case there was a serious conflict over pastures (apparently trespassing is not considered a serious offense), another one somewhat pathetically stated that he just paid for some 'peace of mind'. Others again concluded a contract because their neighbors did so, too, or because they inherited a contract from their parents.

It thus becomes obvious that the pasture legislation and the related organizational framework cause much discontent and many conflicts among pasture users. At the same time, however, they offer little scope for mediation. Many leaseholders opt not to

contact the *rayon* pasture expert, since they do not expect any help from him and mistrust formal juridical procedures in general. Also the local *aksakal* council and court have never been involved so far, although the Kyrgyz state established these institutions to solve minor local conflicts (compare with 4.2.2). Even decisions taken at the locally institutionalized *tülöö* gathering are not necessarily respected, even though it is the most important annual meeting of the communal authorities, herders and other livestock owners. Instead, more influential herders often renegotiate the terms and rules for herding and adjust them to their own needs (10.2.3). During research, pasture-related conflicts are increasingly a topic of discussion at public meetings of the Jergetal TPS, which were organized to raise local awareness about the establishment of a communal Pasture Users' Association (see 10.5.2 below). However, since leaseholders and *saray* owners from *Teshik* or *Tektyr Saz* hardly ever participated, these meetings could not help to solve these conflicts.

So far, disputes between leaseholders and non-leaseholders, and between *saray* owners and other herding households have thus often been solved bilaterally. In practice, this means that the less powerful party had to move on to another place and/or had to adapt its seasonal mobility pattern for good. However, if it comes to more fundamental conflicts about pasture use, the apparent lack of functioning, widely respected conflict resolution mechanisms is a major problem – all the more so in conjunction with widespread nepotism and corruption[149]. This kind of more fundamental conflict may arise between herding households as a whole and other stakeholders such as commercial hunting groups or – as in the case of Jergetal – a mining company. In the absence of an independent jurisdiction at all state levels, the more powerful party can usually enforce their terms and conditions upon the others. In the case of Jergetal, this happened twice when two mining companies began to dig for gold, silver and other precious metals on the intensive pastures of *Tektyr-Saz* and *Kumbel* (see Map 10.1).

Conflicts between mining companies and herders

In the first case, a Chinese-funded company exploited a pasture lot on *Tektyr-Saz* without an official mining permit. In summer 2007, it became obvious that the small open-cast mine, located in a narrow gorge, severely polluted a small tributary of the Jergetal river, i.e. the main drinking water supply for the local population. Obviously, personal relations with the *rayon* state administration enabled the operator to obtain an informal right to exploit the site. As a consequence, local people's resistance to the open-cast mine was ineffective for a long time, since neither the *rayon akym* nor the *rayon* court were ready to accept their complaint. At the same time, interventions by local authorities, including *aksakals* and representatives of the *ayil kengesh*, remained without effect due to their limited authority and power beyond the communal jurisdiction. Consequently, even the formal leaseholder of the respective pasture lot had to realize that his pasture lease contract was of little practical value. The conflict was eventually 'solved' when the Chinese operators did not return to the site after the winter break.

The second case relates to the *Spektor* mining company mentioned at the very beginning of this study (see chapters 1 and 5.1.2). The company, which is Chinese-owned but operated by Russians, and which locals use to call the *kombinat*, started open-cast mining on the *Kumbel jailoo* in 2006 (Figure 10.4). After two years, the mine had expanded its activities over a large area, affecting the pasture lots of at least two leaseholders and starting to spoil several tributaries of the Jergetal river. Yet unlike the smaller company on *Tektyr Saz*, the *Spektor* management did have all the necessary licenses from the national and the *oblast* level to secure a five-year mining right for a

[149] In 2007, Transparency International ranked Kyrgyzstan's judicial system 142nd among 163 countries (Transparency International 2007, 330).

Figure 10.4 Part of the *Spektor* open-cast mine on Kumbel *jailoo* (photo by Gregor Beer, 2009).

perimeter of 21,458 ha in total (see Map 10.1)[150]. The company also soon began to improve the existing roads from the next highway to the mineral deposits so that large trucks could access the mine. Although people generally appreciated this investment – something their government had not yet been able to provide – they soon realized that the new mine was also starting to spoil their drinking water by contaminating several tributaries of the Jergetal river with dangerous chemicals. Again, several local people started to protest against the company and tried to rally support at local and *rayon* level. However, they could not attract the interest of *rayon* state representatives, nor did they manage to find an independent laboratory to test water samples taken from several tributaries.[151]

Eventually, the conflict was 'solved' in a different way. When local protests increased, the Russian manager decided to pay the *ayil okmotu* a first installment of 100,000 KGS (US $2,300) in compensation for the damage[152]. After this, the local state representatives stopped campaigning against the mining company. Soon after that, in 2007, the management began to employ local people as miners, offering them 15-day shifts and daily wages of 700 to 1,000 KGS (US $16 to 23) – an exceptionally good salary for local and even regional circumstances. By summer 2008, around 70 people from the village had taken up employment in the mine, also including some herders living close to the *kombinat* during the summer. Apparently, ordinary mine workers did not receive a work contract and often did not know whether they would still be employed at the end of their shift. In addition, nobody exactly knew how long the *kombinat* would operate for. Since then, local protests against the *kombinat* have calmed down, although many people both on the summer pastures and in the village continue to complain about polluted water and destroyed pastures (Steimann 2008; 2009).

[150] Personal communication with a representative of the Naryn Oblast *leskhoz*, 2 September 2008.
[151] Personal communication, local *ayil kengesh* councillor, 21 Oct 2007.
[152] Several local respondents said that the *ayil okmotu* also received a lamb and several bottles of vodka.

10.5 The 2009 pasture legislation reform: formal adjustments and preventive practices

In reaction to the low effectiveness of the pasture legislation, various state departments began to draft new pasture legislation in association with a number of donor agencies. Many of the responsible authorities had meanwhile realized that the state representatives at *oblast*, *rayon* and *ayil okmotu* level were hardly ever able to carry out all the tasks defined by the pasture laws (Childress et al. 2003; Undeland 2005). Apparently, the administrative division of pastures between different state levels as well as the leasing procedure failed to make pasture use more efficient and sustainable. In addition, the malfunctioning system generated very little revenue for the Kyrgyz state, while at the same time the leasing process was increasingly criticized for discriminating against the less wealthy (Liechti and Biber-Klemm 2008). Thus, in 2008, even the director of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department stated:

> "Today, everybody – farmers, *rayon*, *oblast* – is convinced that the old document [legislation] has turned out to be bad." (Abdymalik Egemberdiev, Director of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department, 11 Sept 2008)

The increasing criticism from local pasture users, as well as Kyrgyz and foreign experts, eventually resulted in a broad effort to revise pasture legislation.

10.5.1 The new law 'On Pastures'

Under the guidance of the World Bank, various donor and implementing agencies, ministries and departments began work on a new pasture law. Finally, after long and fierce debates between the organizations and institutions involved (mainly about the future distribution of pasture revenues between local communities and state departments), the Kyrgyz parliament passed a new law 'On Pastures' on 6 February 2009 and it came into effect by a government resolution dated 24 June 2009. The new law introduces three fundamental changes in pasture management. First, it abandons the administrative classification of pastures into village-adjacent, intensive and remote pastures. Second, it devolves authority over all pastures assigned to an *ayil okmotu* to the communal authorities – with the important exception of all *leskhoz* pastures, which remain under the authority of the State Agency for Environment and Forestry. In turn, the communal authorities are asked to delegate the respective powers to a newly established organization of local pasture users (see below). Third, the law abolishes the area-based pasture lease system and replaces it with a fee-per-animal system called a 'pasture ticketing system'.

The implementation of the new legislation, including the introduction of the new pasture ticketing system, is supported by the World Bank's 'Agricultural Investments and Services Project' (AISP), launched in 2008. The Kyrgyz Republic's Community Development and Investment Agency (ARIS) is responsible for local project assistance, including training local people to plan and monitor pasture management, and for establishing local conflict resolution mechanisms. The project plan aims to cover all 475 Kyrgyz communities and rural towns within three years (World Bank 2008; Bolotbaeva 2009).

In order to establish a comprehensive system of local pasture management, the AISP developed a detailed organizational framework to be implemented at community level. The project appraisal (World Bank 2008) gives a detailed account of election procedures, roles and responsibilities of the different organizations to be established within a community and relations between them. These include a 'Pasture Users' Association', several 'Pasture Users' Groups' as well as a 'Pasture Management Council'. The predefined set-up should secure democratic procedures and balanced

power relations at local level and should allow for quick and standardized implementation in all 475 target communities. It builds on experience in a few pilot villages, where different implementing agencies such as CAMP Ala-Too and UNDP have been establishing initial, informal groups of pasture users since May 2007[153].

At the core of the proposed framework and its major decision-making body is the 'Pasture Management Council' (PMC). It is made up of local pasture users, members of the *ayil kengesh*, the head of the *ayil okmotu*, and others. Its task is to prepare a medium-term community pasture management plan as well as an annual pasture-use plan based on local needs and requirements. The community pasture management plan provides information about the number of animals, grazing times and duration, rotation schemes and pasture improvement measures, and is the basis for monitoring and assessing the use and condition of pastures. In addition, the PMC also collects pasture user fees, part of which is then to be reinvested in pasture improvement measures.

10.5.2 Coping strategies of state representatives

When the new pasture legislation came into effect in summer 2009, I had already completed the empirical field research for this study. However, the preparatory phase for the new law extended over several years, and various rumors and half-truths about the prospective changes had spread to the countryside. Thus, local state representatives and pasture users alike formed their opinions about the reforms and sometimes even adjusted their practices preemptively. In an attempt to increase revenues and strengthen the *oblast*'s role in regulating the use of remote summer pastures, in 2008 the *oblast* state administration decided to promote the pasture expert for Naryn *rayon* and to make him responsible for allocating all remote pastures. Although it had already become clear by that time that the *oblast* and the *rayon* state administration would lose their authority over intensive and remote pastures, the pasture expert immediately began visiting different pastures and signing as many lease contracts as possible. Since he knew that the lease system was to be abandoned soon, he began to issue one-year contracts, despite being aware that the existing pasture legislation explicitly prohibited contract periods of less than five years. At the same time, the expert had a rather negative attitude towards the legal reforms. He denied that the local communities would be in a position to allocate and manage pastures properly and sustainably in the future.

> "It is a pity that the money [the pasture revenues] is not invested in pastures – nobody is interested in pastures, neither the *rayon akym* nor the *ayil okmotus*. Nobody in Bishkek cares either." (Naryn *oblast* pasture expert, 30 July 2008)

Having little trust in communal pasture management, the expert thus continued to pursue his own plans to establish a strong central pasture authority to manage and control all pastures within the boundaries of Naryn *oblast*. This was to be financed by pasture revenues and donor support. His prospects for success were rather gloomy though, not only because his plans contradicted the government's plans to further decentralize the state administration but also because most major donors funding natural resource management had long since rallied behind the legal reforms.

The example of the 'lonely expert' nevertheless illustrates how, in a malfunctioning system, individual actors can create considerable room for maneuver for themselves. In his function as Naryn *rayon* pasture expert, he obviously managed to conclude a fairly large number of pasture lease contracts. However, many of these leaseholders never paid their lease fees to the *rayon* state administration. Instead, evidence suggests that many of them paid informally, although it remains unclear where the money went

[153] Personal communication with Erlan Karbai Uulu, ARIS Project Manager, 16 Sep 2008.

(compare with 10.4.2 above). One assumption may be that, at the absence of effective supervision from his superiors and from GosRegistr, the pasture expert managed to establish his own small niche within the system to earn his own livelihood. When the announced reforms threatened to put an end to his presumably informal livelihood strategy, he tried to make the best of it by signing as many short-term contracts as possible and by putting forward his idea of a central pasture authority.

However, in view of the announced decentralization, communal authorities began to look at their new possibilities as well. According to the Naryn *oblast* pasture expert (and much to his discontent), many communities began to advise their citizens against concluding or extending lease agreements with the *rayon* and the *oblast* state administration. In view of the conflicts between leaseholders and non-leaseholders, the Jergetal *ayil kengesh* even considered suspending all lease agreements for the intensive pastures[154]. By contrast, the communal authorities of Kyzyl-Tuu realized that abolishing their moratorium on the lease of intensive and remote pastures would enable them to generate revenue for the communal budget.

10.5.3 The perception of herders

Although the preparatory work for the new legislation lasted several years, the state and involved donor agencies did little to raise awareness among the rural population. Until 2008, local pasture users were often discussing a variety of rumors and half-truths. This was also the case in Jergetal, although CAMP Ala-Too started a pilot project in spring 2007 to test the concept of Pasture Users' Associations (PUA). However, since most pilot workshops were held in the village, active herders were hardly ever able to take part and therefore only had the vaguest of ideas about the institutional reforms. When asked how things could be organized better in future, many herders nevertheless had very firm opinions. On the one hand, most current non-leaseholders argued against any form of pasture lease in the future and referred to their problems accessing the intensive pasture around *Teshik* and *Tektyr-Saz* in spring. Thus, many welcomed the idea of devolving authority over all types of pastures to the *ayil okmotu* in the hope that this would enhance transparency of allocation and management procedures. On the other hand, several leaseholders of intensive pastures extended their contracts with the *rayon* administration or the *leskhoz*. Apparently, they tried to extend their exclusive access rights beyond the date the new legislation was to be ratified, although it was still unclear at that time what would happen with their contracts under the new law[155].

In Kyzyl-Tuu, where pasture lease had been abandoned many years previously, there was a greater range of opinions. Wealthier herding households in particular hoped for a swift introduction of area-based pasture lease, as they were unaware that the new legislation would abolish it. For instance, one herder who did not move to *Arpa* but instead remained on the intensive pastures near *Kurgon Tash* was desperately looking forward to leasing the lot he had been using for years already, although he knew that this might cause problems for his current *jailoo* neighbors.

> "Our neighbors here can come in future, but they will have to pay me something as I plan to lease these pastures in 2009. Soon everything will be rented out and those who do not pay will not be able to herd their animals anymore." (Herder, mid-sized farmer, *Kurgon Tash*) [#019]

[154] Personal communication with a member of the Jergetal *ayil kengesh*, 9 Nov 2007.

[155] As a matter of fact, existing lease contracts with the *rayon* or the *oblast* administration were abandoned after June 2009. At the same time, all lease contracts with the *leskhoz* remained valid. This has caused considerable discussions in the case of Jergetal (Personal communication with Ulan Kasymov, former director of CAMP Ala-Too, 7 May 2010).

His neighbors, a less wealthy, elderly couple, seemed anything but enthusiastic about his intentions. Aware that they would be unable to reimburse their neighbor, they feared for their future livelihoods. For the same reason, they also rejected the introduction of pasture tickets foreseen in the new law. In addition, they challenged the state's normative conception of pasture ownership by questioning the necessity of paying for a resource that belonged to people already.

> "Selling off the pastures is not good – they already belong to us! (…) God gave the land and the grass to us, and if we didn't come here, who else would use these pastures? There should be no pasture lease and no taxes on pastures in the future. We don't need that to improve our lives! Land taxes and taxes for water are okay, but we shouldn't have to pay more than that. If a tax per animal is introduced, we will be forced to reduce our number of animals." (Herder, smallholder, *Kurgon Tash*) [#021]

Many other herding households who consider themselves 'simple people' (compare with 10.2.1) shared this view. They generally rejected the idea of levying a tax on people's most precious asset, i.e. livestock, because it would directly affect their livelihood prospects. Those herders who tended the animals of paying customers and relatives in particular feared that they would not be able to afford the cost for their large herds. Referring to their difficulties to collect herding fees from their customers in time, they argued that they would simply be unable to collect the money for such additional expenses.

> "Simple people cannot pay such fees. (…) Our customers are not always able to pay us in the autumn, so we have to wait until winter until we get our salary. So how are we supposed to pay these fees?" (Herder, mid-sized farmer, *Arpa jailoo*) [#014]

People also raised very different ideas about the future role of their *ayil okmotu*. Some of the wealthier herding households welcomed the introduction of animal-based user fees, thinking that the community could reinvest the money to improve irrigation, roads and bridges. Others rejected any kind of fees, as they doubted whether the communal authorities would be able to invest them in a useful way. Referring to their *ayil okmotu's* current difficulties in regulating herding fees and pasture rotation through *tülöö*, many of them wondered how the same authorities would manage and maintain the pastures in the future.

As a matter of fact, the introduction of the new law 'On Pastures' in summer 2009 caused considerable discontent among the rural population. While at least a couple of people in Jergetal were informed that new legislation, including participatory planning and per-animal pasture fees, was coming, people in other villages were taken completely by surprise. According to various informants, widespread uncertainty about the prospects of animal husbandry and pasture use was one of the main reasons – besides soaring electricity prices and endemic corruption – why the number of public protests in Naryn town drastically increased during winter 2009/10 and eventually led to the violent uprising of April 2010[156].

[156] Personal communication with Ulan Kasymov, former director of CAMP Ala-Too, 7 May 2010; and with Ayzaada Bekboeva, Mercy Corps Naryn, 12 May 2010.

11 Summary and conclusions

The provision of 'secure property rights' over resources was a central tenet of the Kyrgyz agrarian reforms in the 1990s. As I have argued earlier, however, property rights do not simply exist between people and resources but also between people with respect to resources. Such relations are manifold and are constituted through groups, family, kin, community and the like (Hann 2006, 19). This is why, in Chapters 9 and 10, I analyzed what various actors do today to secure and make use of their property rights over arable land, livestock and pastures, and what role related institutions and organizations play.

The evidence presented in Chapters 9 and 10 makes clear that people's property rights over natural resources are not simply defined by their endowment with legal ownership rights. Instead, property of land, livestock and pastures is also based on cultural norms and practices as well as on concrete social relationships between people, including socioeconomic disparities and power relations between various actors. This means that changes in property relations over land, livestock and pastures also altered the social relations between various actors. In addition, it becomes clear that today not all households and individuals in the two case study villages have the same chances of using their property in a way that allows them to make a decent living. In some cases, private property over resources can even have a detrimental effect on people's livelihoods.

11.1 Private land: burden or blessing?

"I can't put the land in my pocket or take it home. The land stays…" This statement by a farmer at the beginning of Chapter 9 not only expresses the security inherent in arable land as an immobile resource which cannot be carried off by others. It also points to the fact that the immobility of arable land has made it a cost-intensive resource for many rural Kyrgyz.

Land shortage and taxation

In the case of Jergetal, the agrarian reforms of the mid-1990s resulted in a widespread shortage of land at household level. The large kolkhoz fields were split up into tiny individual plots, which were then allocated to households as a bundle of individual, often scattered land shares. Consequently, access to sufficient land did not only become difficult, but simply unaffordable for many of the less wealthy. According to market principles, transfers between households (in the form of land sale and lease) and between households and the state (in the form of land leases from the communal Land Redistribution Fund (LRF)) should be able to compensate for the shortage of arable land. Analysis reveals, however, that neither the local land market nor the regulative institution of the LRF can fully counterbalance land shortage or right some of the wrongs of the privatization process. On the one hand, only a few people are ready to sell their unused land shares to others, while land is usually only leased out on a short-term basis. This is in line with previous studies, which have shown that by and large the Kyrgyz land market has remained a rental market (Childress et al. 2003; Jones 2003; Trouchine and Zitzmann 2005; Eriksson 2006). On the other hand, evidence from Jergetal suggests that the LRF mainly benefits wealthy people. Renting land from the communal fund not only entails costs for rental fees and additional land taxes, but also high cultivation costs due to the distances between the village and the LRF land. Most smallholders and households without livestock (but also many mid-sized farmers)

can hardly afford such expenditure. By contrast, unclear rules and weak communal management regarding the so-called 're-cultivation land' in Jergetal allow wealthier households to cope with land shortage. Nevertheless, evidence from Kyzyl-Tuu also shows that under different circumstances, the LRF has a certain potential to reduce land shortages for the less wealthy.

Direct and indirect taxation on arable land is an important reason for the prevalence of short-term lease agreements between private farmers and the practice of informal land acquisition. Arable land not only bears the burden of land and social taxes, but also serves as a basis for calculating child allowances. Seen from this perspective, it may come as a surprise that only a few people are prepared to sell their unused arable land. Jones (2003, 267) assumes that this reluctance may be related to the fact that ownership of private arable land gives a certain sense of livelihood security despite all the obstacles to using land in an economically profitable way. After all, livelihood alternatives are very limited in rural areas, so many people may consider re-cultivating their currently unused land once they have the means to do so. However, as Bebbington (1999; compare 2.4.1) points out, resources such as land can also give meaning to a person's world, so there may be more than just economic explanations for people's reluctance to give their land away. However, evidence from Kyzyl-Tuu also shows that many households have simply refused to pay their land taxes so far, although this deprives them of their formal ownership rights. Thus, the observed disparities regarding per capita land ownership (see 5.4) reflect people's varying ability to make use of their land, rather than a physical 'redistribution' of arable land between asset-poor and asset-rich households[157].

High transaction costs for cultivation-related inputs

Access to other production factors is usually associated with significant transaction costs and thus related practices again reflect the large gap between asset-poor and asset-rich households. In conjunction with the often difficult access to seeds and fertilizers, the chronic shortage of water for irrigation and declining land productivity has forced many to abandon growing wheat, and has even badly affected recent forage and hay yields. Access to functioning machinery is related to repeated price negotiations for those who have not 'inherited' machines from the kolkhoz, or who cannot access them through kin or friends. Regarding workforce, labor is usually pooled within households and among close relatives, but hardly ever beyond. If more workforce is required, the less wealthy often revert to the social institution of *ashar*, while wealthier farmers increasingly hire wage laborers, which also allows them to abstain from reciprocal assistance through *ashar*. In order to raise cash, rich and poor households alike take small, locally available loans of up to 2,000 KGS (US $48; mid-sized and large farmers also often provide them). When it comes to commercial agricultural credits, however, less wealthy households often hesitate about applying, since they are unable or unwilling to take the economic risks related to repayment and collateral. Regarding the marketing of crops, the narrow line between net producers and net buyers became visible when harvests collapsed after the very dry summer of 2007. While in previous years many of the less wealthy could generate some welcome cash income by selling hay and fodder crops, they suddenly had to buy additional fodder to feed their own animals through the winter. At the same time, the few large farmers who managed to sustain their production profited from the rapidly increasing prices.

The observed practices in the use of arable land thus often reflect existing disparities between rural households. Some of these practices may even have the potential to exacerbate the gap between the asset-rich and the asset-poor, such as lop-sided economic relations between large farmers and smallholders. This inevitably leads us to the question of to what extent current local realities reflect the initial assumptions behind the Kyrgyz agrarian reforms.

[157] As for example described by Lindberg (2007) for northern Kyrgyzstan.

Assets and liabilities of private land ownership

My results highlight that the distribution and eventual privatization of land shares was not a blessing for everyone. Obviously, the agrarian reforms did not necessarily lead to the creation of economically independent private peasant farms. Evidence shows that many rural households are not able to compete with others on equal terms. This is not to say that most farmers would not support and approve of private land ownership. Private ownership of land endows people with economic value which they can use in various ways, as well as with symbolic value that gives them a certain sense of security and independence. At the same time, however, land ownership brings with it new liabilities. Irrigation is subject to the payment of user fees and contributions for maintenance, the terms for the use of machinery must be constantly renegotiated, and arable land is subject to taxes. People's practices around the use of arable land have thus become closely related to monetary exchange and barter. This presents a major obstacle for many among the less wealthy, who often struggle to earn sufficient cash in the local context, and who do not usually have sufficient savings in the form of livestock. The estimated 35% of all distributed land in Kyzyl-Tuu that have not yet been transferred into private ownership are a striking example of this (see Map 9.1). Over ten years after the heyday of reforms, the concept of private farm units has not yet been fully accepted, land has become a liability rather than an asset for many, and a great deal of land has fallen out of production. Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu thus strongly resemble cases in other post-socialist rural areas (cf. Hann 2006; Herbers 2006a,b).

But the effects of decollectivization are not restricted to the economic sphere. Despite – or maybe because of – their failure to transform all rural citizens into independent, powerful market participants, the agrarian reforms have also profoundly altered rural social relations. At least regarding the use of land, the changes in property rights have resulted in a new social stratification. Despite the general shortage of water and other key inputs for agrarian production, many mid-sized and large farm households can still produce sufficient grain, forage and hay. Some of them can sell their grain surplus and generate valuable cash income; others lend grain to those who have no seeds, expecting part of the harvest in return. This can – intentionally or not – create new dependencies among households. Many of those who have a mid-sized or large farm today were among those who received large connected land shares in the mid-1990s, or who secured or gained access to functioning machines and means of transport. Smallholders and households without livestock, however, still struggle with the immense challenges related to ecologically sustainable (keeping productivity stable) and economically profitable (producing enough to make a living) land cultivation. Evidence from Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu shows that not all of them cope successfully with this struggle and eventually turn away from land cultivation.

11.2 Pastures: various strategies of claim and access

In Chapter 10, I examined people's practices regarding pastoral production, which comprises the two basic resources of livestock and pastures. Evidence shows that these practices are governed to a large extent by the socioeconomic value and significance of livestock in rural Kyrgyz society. In the absence of reliable and easily accessible banks and credit providers, livestock is a key financial asset for most rural households since it can be converted into cash whenever need arises and also serves as an important investment fund. But livestock is also the key factor in the reproduction of social relations and the definition of wealth. Relations with relatives, kin, neighbors and friends are usually established and maintained through the use of livestock as gifts, dowries and invitations for feasts. Consequently, those with a lot of livestock often have a better chance of maintaining, improving and increasing their social network than those with only a few sheep and hens.

Similarly, local socioeconomic realities are also reflected in people's animal husbandry and pasture use arrangements. These include relations between different individuals and households, employer-employee constellations, and neighborhood patterns. Consequently, herding households select summer pastures according to a complex set of economic, ecological, social and institutional criteria. They do not just go 'where the grass is greener' and where water is abundant; their decision depends just as much on their access to markets (usually in the form of traveling traders), their household's wealth, their relation with relatives and paying customers, and their agreement with a single employer, as well as on their neighbors on the *jailoo*. Similarly, livestock owners and herding households deploy different strategies to claim and defend their rights over pastures (see 11.3 below). The movement patterns of herding households, the location of *sarays* and people's preferred *jailoos* therefore also reflect the diverse constellations of social networks and the changing economic relations between different local actors (compare Map 10.1 and 10.2).

As a consequence of the variety and volatility of social and economic relations governing animal husbandry and pasture use, the influence of different organizations, institutions and their representatives on local pasture use and management is highly diverse, too. Without aiming to draw a clear line between formal and informal organizations, institutions and actors, I examined the roles of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department and its regional representative, the communal authorities, the annual *tülöö* meeting, local herders, and others. Evidence shows that not all organizations, institutions and actors are equally relevant to everyone. For instance, only a minority of local pasture users ever concluded a formal pasture lease agreement, although they are required to do so by law. In the same way, not all herders respect decisions taken at the *tülöö*, which is widely perceived as the key event for the local regulation of pasture access and use. Instead, herders often agree on the terms and conditions of herding among themselves and according to their own livelihood needs. Thus, it can sometimes be important to herders to remain outside formalized forms of organization such as the *tülöö*. This also explains why different respondents give totally different views of what the formal structure is, and why there is such a "wide array of (…) informal forms of organizing through personal networks, patron-client relations and customary institutions" (Nuijten 2005, 4f).

11.3 Layered property and practices of 'forum shopping'

The evidence presented in Chapters 9 and 10 thus illustrates that official legislation (such as the Land Code or the pasture law) is neither the only nor the main institution through which land and pastures in the two case study villages are governed. Instead, it is just one element among other less formalized rules and practices that constitute what Appendini and Nuijten (2002; see 2.4.1) call the 'local institutional context'.

Table 11.1 sorts out these different orders by referring to the four layers of property as put forward by Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006, see 2.3.3). It shows that property over resources is constituted of different layers, including social relationships (e.g. kinship), power differences (e.g. socioeconomic disparities), and people's actual practices. Legal regulations, i.e. formal ownership rights, are only one of these layers, and for many actors they are not the most important point of reference to legitimize their claims to resources (Benda-Beckmann et al. 2006; see 2.3.3).

Table 11.1 The four layers of property regarding arable land and pastures

	Arable land	Pastures
Cultural-ideological layer	Private and communal property	State property versus local concepts of common and private property
Layer of legal regulation	National Land Code (open land market since 2001)	National Pasture Legislation (lease system) versus communal regulations and customary rights; common versus private and open access regimes
Concrete social relationships	Wealth disparities regulate access to arable land	Wealth disparities regulate access to pastures; economic dependencies between herders and customers, employers and employees; power disparities between herders and mining companies
Property practices (Organizing practices)	E.g. Illicit appropriation of communal re-cultivation land by wealthy farmers; Hiring less wealthy neighbors as field workers; Lease of machines among households	E.g. Access to pastures with or without lease contract; exclusion of non-leaseholders; construction of *saray* to lay claim to a pasture lot; double taxation of village adjacent pastures in Jergetal; appropriation of communal pastures by mining companies

As I have noted earlier, the layer of property practices feeds back into the other three layers, since ideologies, laws and social relationships are reflected, reproduced and eventually transformed into concrete practices. I therefore focus on the organizing practices of state representatives and local resource users to discuss the interdependencies between the four layers of property.

Organizing practices of state representatives

Evidence shows that even state representatives at local and regional level do not always abide by official laws. For instance, the communal authorities of Kyzyl-Tuu boycotted the pasture legislation for several years, fearing that it might foster conflicts among local people. At the same time, the authorities in Jergetal received double revenues for the village-adjacent pastures (see 10.3.2), while doing little to counter the illicit appropriation of re-cultivation land by wealthy households (see 8.2.3). Even the Naryn *rayon* pasture expert ignored existing regulations regarding the minimal duration of lease agreements when, in 2008, he tried to wrap up as many short-term lease agreements as possible before the new pasture legislation came into effect. However, the considerable gap between *de jure* and *de facto* procedures regarding pasture use and management does not only occur when certain rules conflict with the personal objectives of state representatives, but also emerges from ignorance or a physical or technical inability to implement the law (e.g. because there is no car to visit the pastures). All this shows that even 'formal actors' do not always act in accordance with the rules and regulations, and that formal institutions do not necessarily cause formal behavior of those representing them. Or, in the words of Giddens, "'social facts' might constrain what we do, [but] they do not *determine* what we do." (Giddens 1997, 569f; italics in the original).

Either way, the formal organization of pasture use and management hardly ever yields any real benefits for the majority of local pasture users – irrespective of whether the legislation is enforced or not. It can be assumed that a strict implementation of the pasture legislation – including competitive lease procedures for pasture lots – would favor the few wealthy households able to compete in a money-driven market. However, the example of Jergetal also shows that a fragmentary and selective application of the pasture legislation can be equally detrimental to less powerful actors,

who are denied access to large areas of pastures by others. Needless to say, this can result in long-lasting resource conflicts (see 10.4.6). Yet even the Kyzyl-Tuu communal authorities' complete boycott of the pasture legislation did not result in equal and fair conditions for everyone. Instead, it resulted in a virtual open-access regime, which for instance allows wealthier households to claim their rights over certain pastures by building a *saray* (see 10.4.5)[158]. Irrespective of the degree of enforcement, the formal structure for pasture use and management thus creates much institutional uncertainty and has considerable potential to stir up conflict among resource users. At the same time, it offers few avenues of mediation. People neither have sufficient trust in state representatives, nor do they have any real possibility to take legal action if their formal property rights over pastures are violated. Yet while this uncertainty constitutes a serious impediment to the livelihood options of many people, it can also be an advantage for those who have the necessary means to circumvent existing rules and procedures and enforce their own norms and practices.

Farmers' and herders' practices of 'forum shopping'

Evidence from Jergetal and Kyzyl-Tuu shows that concrete social relationships – i.e. socioeconomic disparities and the resulting economic and social dependencies between the rich and the poor – can have considerable influence on people's property rights over resources. Wealthier households draw more often than others on both formal and informal norms and practices to legitimize their claims to arable land and pastures. Academic literature usually refers to such behavior as *forum shopping*. In an uncertain environment, actors try to hold on to their resources by maneuvering between various legitimating principles and standards of measure, and by improvising on practised routines within a complex institutional context (see 2.3.3)[159].

For instance, several mid-sized and large farm households in Jergetal began to use communal land known as 're-cultivation land' without asking for communal permission. Having invested much time and money into re-cultivating the plot and being aware that not many other households would have the requisite means to do the same, many of these farmers considered the land their property. However, when the communal authorities noticed their behavior, the farmers usually agreed to sign a lease agreement that legalized their claim *ex post* (see 9.2.3). In another example, many wealthier herding households from Jergetal concluded a pasture lease agreement to legitimize their exclusive access to intensive pastures and thus defend them from other herders. However, as soon as they had obtained the contract, many of them stopped paying the annual lease fee to the state authorities, or reverted to informal payments. As they were aware of the state's inability to enforce the law and to sanction offenders, they could afford to maneuver between acceptance and rejection of formal institutions (see 10.4.3). Yet another example concerns the construction of *sarays* on the intensive pastures of Kyzyl-Tuu. Several mid-sized and large farmers bought an official construction permit from the *rayon* authorities. Even though none of these households ever concluded a formal pasture lease contract with the *rayon* authorities, having a *saray* on the intensive pastures allows them to lay an informal yet effective claim to the pastures adjacent to their new building.

The examples show that comparably wealthy households can often use formal rules and regulations when they come in handy in order to secure their livelihoods, but they also recombine these rules with other, less formal strategies and routine behavior. If necessary, formal rules and procedures are even rejected *en masse*. The practice of *forum shopping* that I observed thus highlights the central importance of negotiating power of different actors; those able to draw on several sources to legitimize their

[158] In this case, the builder-owners also profit from a striking lack of communication between different state agencies, in particular between the Architecture Department and GosRegistr.

[159] Other notions brought forward in the critical transition literature to describe such behaviour include 'institutional bricolage' (Cleaver 2001) and 'recombinant property' (Stark 1996; Stark and Bruszt 2001; compare 2.2.2).

rights can usually establish stronger property rights (Meinzen-Pradhan 2001, 2002; see 2.3.3). In the context of rural Kyrgyzstan, negotiating power is often equal to wealth in livestock. This again highlights the significance of the socioeconomic disparities outlined in Chapter 5 for people's property rights over natural resources – irrespective of the formal property rights they were endowed with in the course of the agrarian reforms of the 1990s. It would however be wrong to assume that only the wealthy can practice *forum shopping*. Instead, less wealthy households also maneuver between different frames of reference, although their range of possibilities is not so large. One example of this is the behavior of herders who participate in the annual *tülöö* meeting to negotiate the annual herding fees with the communal authorities but adjust the fees to suit their own needs a few days later (see 10.2.3). There are several explanations for why herders can afford to reject the communal authority. On the one hand, their key position in the functioning of animal husbandry at local level endows them with considerable negotiating power, since people who cannot herd themselves depend on their services. On the other hand, most herders know that the communal authorities have few means to sanction their behavior or else they put up with potential fines (see 10.4.2). The same maneuvering between the formal and the informal can be observed in the discussion about pasture use fees. Most herders reject the idea of paying pasture use fees, arguing that the communal authorities would be incapable of investing them in a useful way anyway. At the same time, however, they say that only the communal authorities are in a position to maintain pasture-related infrastructure, such as roads and bridges.

'What is happening' – the role of formal organization

> "I am in no way arguing that formal organization is irrelevant to what is happening – only that formal organization is not what is happening." (Barth 1993, 157)

This quote may be the best summary of everything that has been said above. The evidence presented in Part C makes clear that formal rules such as the official Kyrgyz pasture legislation, as well as the state organizations and actors representing it, have only a limited impact on local use of arable land and pastures. Many actors – state representatives included – do not necessarily care about formal rules or reject them as inappropriate and hindering for their personal objectives. Formal organization is thus neither the only, nor the main means through which land cultivation and pasture management are governed, but is just one aspect among many, constituting what Appendini and Nuijten (2002; see 2.4.1) call the 'local institutional context'. In this context, different actors make use of various institutions and organizing practices to negotiate and constantly re-negotiate their property rights over resources and thus the terms and conditions of agro-pastoral production at large. 'What is happening' is thus much more than the mere response to formal rules and regulations, but is closely related to social relations at communal, household and individual level, to gender roles, to the wealth and social status of households and individuals, and to people's level of trust in their neighbors, in the state and its representatives, and in other institutions and organizations.

The alteration of property relations by the Kyrygz agrarian reform program has thus not only redefined the value of land and other resources, but also the livelihood prospects of and the social relations among various actors, between the asset-rich and the asset-poor. To a considerable extent, community life has thus followed the logic of the market and social relations have become embedded in the (yet poorly regulated) economic system, not vice versa (McCay and Jentoft 1998, 26; Bichsel et al. 2010). While wealthy and powerful actors can often extend their claims over certain resources, the less powerful often struggle with increased uncertainties, since it is becoming more difficult to predict how others will behave.

12 Conclusions and implications: the multiple ways of making a living in uncertainty

"We used the livestock we received, and we lost most of it. Those who have kept their livestock from then are rich now."

Smallholder, Kyzyl-Tuu [3b8]

"Not all five fingers of a hand are the same. Some people have animals, others do not."

Mid-sized farmer, Jergetal [3b18]

I began this study with a short description of a conflict between local herders and a foreign mining company on the intensive pastures of one of my case study villages. I did so because I was puzzled by the fact that many herders and other local residents had begun to work in the mine, although they knew that the exploitation of their pastures and the pollution of the streams directly conflicted with their agro-pastoral livelihoods. Although I could not examine the case in every detail, I realized that it reflects some of the very issues this thesis focuses on. Therefore, the evidence presented in this study might at least have highlighted some of the processes behind this confusing situation. Apparently, people's apparently contradictory behavior in this 'mining case' does not exactly reflect what the radical reformers of the 1990s thought rural Kyrgyz people in the late 2000s would do. In fact, development in rural Kyrgyzstan has taken other trajectories than the straight neoliberal pathway prescribed and predicted by the disciples of the Washington Consensus. Evidence from the micro level suggests that the rural Kyrgyz economy has so far not developed into a free market economy, and that most rural people are still far from the neoliberal ideal of powerful, self-determined market participants endowed with secure property rights over resources.

This insight is not entirely new, however. Recent critical advances in the study of post-socialism have argued that the neoliberal transition paradigm cannot explain the multiple outcomes of the Soviet collapse and of the subsequent reform policies at both local and household level. In line with this critique, I deployed a set of "middle-range concepts capable of (…) charting diversity" (Stark and Bruszt 2001, 1130) and adopted a livelihoods perspective to explore local processes of transformation from the point of view of the actors. Focusing on agro-pastoral livelihoods and processes of institutional change in rural Kyrgyzstan, I then examined processes of post-socialist transformation at local and household level. To do this, I analyzed the interplay between concrete livelihood realities and the wider organizational and institutional context of agro-pastoral production in two villages in Naryn *oblast*, Central Kyrgyzstan.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 12.1 sums up the empirical findings of the study and outlines the main local obstacles and opportunities thrown up by twenty years of post-socialist transformation and with which rural households must cope today to make a living. Section 12.2 refers to the notion of *uncertainty* (Mehta et al. 1999, 2001; see 2.4.2) to categorize these obstacles and opportunities. Section 12.3 then examines the role of different forms of uncertainty for various *livelihood trajectories* (Ashley et al. 2003; see 2.4.3) and explains why certain households seem to be trapped in a negative trajectory, while others are not. Section 12.4 reflects on how such negative trajectories may be reversed in future and explains why certain development approaches that emphasize the building of new local institutions may reinforce rather than abolish the current divide between those who have and those who have not. The chapter concludes with a number of open questions for future research.

12.1 Main findings of the study

After an introduction to theoretical and methodological approaches to transformation and concrete policies of transition in the Kyrgyz Republic, the first focus of the study was on the persistence of old and the emergence of new socioeconomic disparities in rural Kyrgyzstan. The results of a quantitative household survey carried out in spring 2007 revealed considerable disparities between households in relation to livestock ownership – which is the most common wealth indicator in rural Kyrgyzstan – and pastoral income sources. In both villages, a few large farm households own more than 70 livestock units, which is equivalent to 70 cows or 350 sheep. At the same time, many households have no more than one cow or five sheep; some have no livestock at all. In between these two extremes, smallholders and mid-sized farmers keep flocks which usually help them to make a living, but do not necessarily allow them to generate cash income from animal husbandry. Instead, a large amount of these middle-class households depends on social support, either from the state or from relatives and friends. Qualitative research showed that such disparities used to exist in Soviet times too. In contrast to the socialist ideals of egalitarianism and equity, the redistributive economy and the kolkhoz principle allowed rural elites – kolkhoz chairmen and leading personnel, party leaders, and to some degree also kolkhoz herders – to earn considerably more than others and to accumulate wealth, e.g. in the form of large numbers of private livestock. However, the system's shortcomings and the existence of a so-called 'second economy' allowed ordinary kolkhoz workers to profit from mostly illicit transfers between the kolkhoz economy and their own subsistence production as well. By the late 1980s, it was thus not the kolkhoz *per se* but the symbiotic relationship between the state and the semi-formal private economy that enabled the rural Kyrgyz population to survive.

By disbanding the state economy, the agrarian reforms of the 1990s put a swift end to this symbiosis. Thus, paradoxically, privatization made private agrarian production more difficult for many and exacerbated existing socioeconomic disparities. The rapid dissolution of collective farms and the distribution of arable land, livestock and indivisible property were not always fully transparent and often preempted regulative policies decreed by central government. In many cases, this was to the advantage of rural elites who often received better land plots and healthier animals than others. By endowing all rural households with land and livestock, the agrarian reforms also benefited those with the necessary knowledge and experience to practice farming and animal husbandry or to market agricultural produce (see Table 8.1). It thus becomes clear that what happened after 1991 was anything but a start from scratch – despite the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union took many by surprise and the subsequent reforms were labeled 'shock therapy'. Instead, it was a gradual reworking of a complex institutional context, so that the privatization of the Kyrgyz agriculture took place in a hybrid economic and political system. Thus, although formal property rights and professional and social networks were rapidly reworked after 1991, the socialist legacy – in the form of wealth, skills, knowledge, and social networks – has continued to influence post-socialist development up to the present day.

The second focus of the study was on current actors, organizing practices, institutions and organizations around agro-pastoral livelihoods. It started from the assumption that property rights over resources such as land, livestock and pastures are never really 'secure', but that they are constantly renegotiated orders between different actors endowed with differing degrees of negotiating power. Evidence showed that households without their own animals as well as smallholders often struggle to access their private land plots outside the village. Especially in Jergetal, many private plots are scattered and far from people's homes, so that high transport costs often make cultivating them unprofitable. In addition, many farmers have difficulties getting access to necessary production inputs such as irrigation water, machinery, workforce and cash. In the absence of the former illicit transfers of inputs from the kolkhoz, people's

practices around the use of arable land have thus become more and more characterized by monetary exchange and barter. Nowadays, farming the land involves paying irrigation fees and taxes, hiring machines and workers, and buying seeds and fuel. This is a major obstacle for those who have only little to offer. In the long term, the redefinition of property rights over land has thus led to a new social stratification. While many mid-sized and large farm households can cover their subsistence needs of grain and fodder and can thus combine farming and animal husbandry, less wealthy households increasingly feel that private land is a liability rather than an asset. This is why many of them have turned away from cultivating the land in recent years and have increasingly pinned their hopes on animal husbandry.

Unlike arable land, pastures remained in the sole ownership of the Kyrgyz state but were assigned to rural communities. Local people were given the right to use these pastures in accordance with certain rules and regulations, including the payment of an annual lump sum or the conclusion of an area-based lease contract (depending on the type of pastures). However, analysis revealed a striking gap between these formal rules, their implementation by state representatives and the actual resource use practices of local pasture users. On the one hand, pasture legislation[160] is poorly adapted to local people's needs and practices. The formal classification of pastures as village-adjacent, intensive and remote does not take into account the highly flexible character of animal husbandry, where flock sizes often vary and herders choose their pastures according to a set of economic, social, ecological and institutional criteria (see 10.4.2). On the other hand, signing a pasture lease contract involves a very complicated formal procedure, so many herders therefore choose not to apply. In addition, the state administration itself bends existing rules, either because there are not enough competent public servants or because legislative loopholes make arbitrary practices possible. Since pasture use and management have also become increasingly monetarized, this allows mid-sized and large farmers in particular to do *forum shopping*, i.e. to refer to different norms and practices to secure their household's access to pastures (see 2.3.3 and 11.3).

To sum up, the empirical evidence presented in this study points towards a number of obstacles and opportunities confronting rural households engaged in agro-pastoral production. However, what some actors may consider an opportunity, others may see as an obstacle. In the next section, I therefore categorize these issues by referring to the notion of *uncertainty*.

12.2 Uncertainty in post-socialist rural Kyrgyzstan

The sociological transition critique has often related processes of post-socialist transformation to the rise of uncertainty. Unlike risk, uncertainty describes a situation characterized by indeterminacies that makes it impossible to calculate probabilities. Evidence from rural Kyrgyzstan shows how uncertainty affects various spheres of people's livelihoods. Referring to Mehta et al. (1999, 2001; compare Table 2.4), Table 10.2 distinguishes four types of uncertainty.

[160] This thesis refers to the pasture legislation in force until summer 2009. In June 2009, the Kyrgyz government passed a new law on pastures. However, since I had already completed my empirical field research by then, the present study focuses on the 'old' legislation valid at the time of research. For the perceptions and preventive practices of various actors regarding the new legislation, see section 9.5.

Table 12.1 Four types of uncertainty in the context of rural Kyrgyzstan

Ecological uncertainties	Increasing frequency of droughts; unpredictable harvest of cash and fodder crops; pasture degradation; detrimental effects of extractive industries on pastures
Livelihood uncertainties	Loss of secured incomes; dependence on state support; price fluctuations; insecure property rights over pastures; overlapping authorities, norms and rules regarding the use of pastures
Knowledge uncertainties	Lack of professional knowledge regarding agro-pastoral production; lack of information on rural markets; partial or nonexistent knowledge regarding the legal framework (e.g. pasture legislation); lack of knowledge about the behavior of others
Social & political uncertainties	Lack of mutual trust and local forms of cooperation; Corruption and arbitrariness of the state administration and the judiciary; unstable political system at all levels

Ecological uncertainties are related to the unpredictable and variable nature of ecosystems with which people interact. Although environmental issues were not the focus of this study, evidence suggests that over recent years many farm households have experienced increasing problems with farming their land. In both villages, a series of exceptionally dry years resulted in low yields, forcing many households to buy fodder instead of selling it. When combined with chronic trouble getting hold of good seeds, sufficient irrigation water and other inputs, farming has thus become too unpredictable for many. As a result, many households have increasingly turned to animal husbandry, which allows them to react more flexibly to droughts and general resource scarcity (cf. Scoones 1992; see 9.5). However, pastoral production has also been confronted with various ecological uncertainties in recent years. The intensive use of village-adjacent pastures since 1991 has badly affected pasture productivity, and concurring forms of pasture use, such as the poorly regulated extractive industry on Jergetal's intensive pastures, present an environmental threat whose long-term effects are as yet difficult to predict.

Livelihood uncertainties mainly refer to the generally unstable institutional context. For many people, the collapse of the socialist economy and the kolkhoz as a 'total social institution' resulted in the concrete loss of regular wages, adequate pensions and subsidized commodities. Little has changed since then. Rural income opportunities are still rare, old age pensions and child allowances are hardly ever sufficient to survive, and commodity prices have been subject to massive – mostly upward – fluctuations in recent years. In addition, many smallholders and households without livestock (but also some mid-sized farmers) struggle to use their private arable land in a profitable way. Regarding animal husbandry, I have shown that it tends to be wealthier herding households that practice *forum shopping*, drawing on different norms and practices to claim and defend their rights over pastures. At the same time, various external actors claim authority over pastures. On the one hand, these include representatives of the state, such as communal, *rayon* and *oblast* authorities, but also the State Agency for Environment and Forestry [Russ. *leskhoz*]. On the other hand, private actors such as foreign mining companies claim their rights to the commercial exploitation of pastures. In the case of Jergetal, these authorities and claims often overlap, which causes considerable confusion and legal uncertainty (see Map 10.1). Needless to say, none of this really reduces people's uncertainty about their prospects regarding pastoral production.

Knowledge uncertainties exist because every single actor relies on a different set of information and because knowledge is always plural and contested. In the kolkhoz system, labor was highly divided, and so was professional knowledge about agro-pastoral production. Even then, the unequal distribution of knowledge allowed some to accumulate more resources and wealth than others. Due to secured wages and

subsidized goods, however, those with very limited skills and knowledge could still make a living, even if it was difficult. After 1991, however, comprehensive knowledge regarding agro-pastoral production became crucial to make a living. Thus, the reforms mainly benefited those who already knew how to cultivate land and/or keep animals. These were mainly brigadiers, other leading personnel, breeding specialists, and herders. Evidence shows that access to knowledge was also crucial during the distribution process itself. Numerous accounts from the two case study villages suggest that in the early 1990s, many of those who knew about the kolkhoz' imminent collapse diverted healthy animals to their own stables or sold machines before they could be distributed to the public.

Today, knowledge is particularly important for those who wish to make a living from herding. Many of those working as herders today either herded for the kolkhoz in the past or inherited the necessary knowledge from their parents. Since herding animals is one of the few local income opportunities today, such knowledge is critical to people's livelihood security. Another form of knowledge uncertainty concerns people's incomplete knowledge about formal rules and procedures, which is particularly apparent in relation to pasture management. While some herders maneuver adroitly between more and less formalized norms and practices to access and use pastures, others do not have the faintest idea about the formal rules and procedures – and this increases their knowledge uncertainty about the behavior of others.

Social and political uncertainties refer to certain trends such as rural out-migration, altered forms of cooperation at the local level, as well as to insecure or altered power relations at various levels, including changes in political regimes. While migration issues have been discussed elsewhere (cf. Schoch et al. forthcoming; Thieme 2008b), the evidence suggests that people's enthusiasm for economic cooperation beyond the own household has rapidly decreased in recent years (see 9.3.3). The first setback for local cooperation came in the form of the neoliberal privatization paradigm, which clamored the superiority of private property and entrepreneurship while associating collective action with 'outdated' socialist ideals. The second setback came when kolkhozes like Karakojun were transformed into 'new cooperatives' – economically unviable pseudo-cooperatives, which only fostered the enrichment of rural elites. The third setback was that those who nevertheless tried to farm their arable land collectively after privatization soon failed. Not only did they lack the necessary inputs and experience, there was also no official support for small-scale cooperatives at that time. The fourth setback was more recent, when a half-hearted attempt by the Kyrgyz government to foster local cooperation drove people's trust in each other and in state institutions to an all-time low (compare Box 9b). In the long run, this has not only curtailed local opportunities for economic synergies, but has also increased people's uncertainty about the behavior of others.

Local people often experience political uncertainties when they are required to deal with state representatives at communal or *rayon* level. Many public servants are unable to fulfill their duties, either because they lack the necessary skills and tools or because they have no funds to invest. As a matter of fact, problems of local funding are endemic, since local revenues are often just sufficient to pay local government and administration staff. The same goes for public services at *rayon* level. At the time of research, the Naryn *rayon* administration was the only one in the whole *oblast* that employed a pasture expert to make pasture lease contracts with local herders. However, even this highly experienced expert had neither the means to visit the pastures in his jurisdiction, nor a reliable map to see them on paper. At the same time, there is surprisingly little cooperation and exchange of knowledge among the various *rayon* departments, as well as between the communal and the *rayon* level. This makes any meaningful coordination of public services strictly impossible. Nowehere is this more apparent than in pasture management, but it also seriously impedes the control of livestock diseases (Näscher 2009). In addition, the ousting of the Bakiev government in April 2010 made clear that the high degree of personality politics makes the Kyrgyz local government anything but stable. As soon as the president was toppled, the Naryn

oblast governor, most *rayon akims* and numerous heads of *ayil okmotu*, including the one in Karakojun, had to step down (see 4.2.2).

Thus, 'making a living in transformation' first and foremost means finding appropriate responses to various forms of uncertainty. However, whether someone considers a situation insecure or not depends to a considerable degree on their wealth and on other social and economic disparities (Mehta et al. 2001; see 2.4.2). Consequently, existing uncertainties shape people's livelihoods in many different ways.

12.3 Uncertainty and livelihood trajectories

People who are confronted with uncertainties usually try to widen their range of options, i.e. to increase the flexibility of the ways in which they can achieve certain objectives (see 2.4). One way of doing this is through *forum shopping*, i.e. to appeal to more than one single norm regarding the access to and the use of resources (Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan 2001). Another way is through income diversification, i.e. to increase the number and diversify the nature of cash and non-cash income sources (cf. Barrett et al. 2001). The considerable socioeconomic disparities that exist today suggest that some households were more successful than others to cope with uncertainty in the long term. On the one hand, practices of *forum shopping* are closely related to wealth, so mid-sized and large farm households can more easily resort to them. On the other hand, smallholders and households without livestock often diversify their incomes spontaneously and in the short term, while wealthier households can often afford to diversify their income sources in a more strategic way. In other words, while some rural households successfully embarked upon a positive *livelihood trajectory*, others repeatedly failed to do so (Bagchi et al. 1998; Ashley et al. 2003).

Negative trajectories: short-term coping responses and insecure property rights

For many of the less wealthy today (households with no livestock and smallholders; compare with 5.3), the vicious cycle of short-term coping and resource depletion began in the early 1990s. Having worked as ordinary *kolkhozniki* in the socialist economy, their lack of knowledge concerning agro-pastoral production often prevented them from handling their new property – land and livestock – in a sustainable way. In conjunction with the striking livelihood uncertainty during the early years of independence – in the form of widespread unemployment, the end of all state support, and a generally insecure future – many then tried to cope in the short term by selling or bartering their animals to survive. At the same time, many of these households tried to cultivate their private plots despite their lack of farming experience, often neglecting the basic rules of crop rotations and efficient irrigation, so that land productivity quickly decreased. Until recently, several smallholders and households without livestock nevertheless produced sufficient forage and hay to sell some of it locally. Yet when ecological uncertainties in the form of repeated droughts increased, many of these small farms soon failed to sustain their production; instead, they suddenly had to buy in fodder. In view of the rapidly increasing fodder prices, selling animals was often the only possible coping response, although this further eroded the households' already scarce asset base. In addition, asset-poor households usually have to sell animals at short notice, i.e. whenever the need arises, even when prices are low and waiting a few weeks would bring them far better price. In the long term, the lack or shortage of private livestock also affects people's social networks. Households with few or no animals increasingly refrain from inviting others and accepting invitations, since they cannot afford to slaughter animals for a feast or buy a present for their hosts. Thus, the importance of livestock as a pivotal point in rural social life excludes many from establishing, improving or preserving their personal relations with others. Instead, less wealthy people often borrow money from mid-sized and large farmers who offer small

loans at relatively low interest rates and do not ask for a mortgage. As a consequence, new social and economic dependencies between wealthy and poor households are emerging.

Positive trajectories: long-term strategies and forum shopping

By contrast, many of those who now belong to the class of mid-sized or large farmers (compare with 5.3) had a comparative advantage in the early 1990s. They generally benefited more from the distribution of land, animals and infrastructure, since they had often worked in leading or specialist positions in the kolkhoz. In the early years of independence, these households could keep their flock size stable more often than others could. Many of them kept a *saray* on the intensive pastures and soon reverted to rotational grazing, and/or they knew how to treat livestock diseases, which allowed them to minimize the number of fatalities after distribution. At the same time, many had the necessary experience to practice farming and combine it with animal husbandry. In Jergetal, some of these households also profited from the fact that they received their arable land in one parcel and not far from the village. Thus having preserved or even increased their wealth, these households have often more, and usually better, opportunities now to improve and secure their access to resources or to diversify their livelihoods. On the one hand, large and mid-sized farm households do not necessarily consider legal pluralism and insecure property rights as uncertainties, since they often have the means to practice *forum shopping* and thus take advantage of the existence of a variety of normative and cognitive orders. On the other hand, they can strategically invest their cash savings – for instance in the local credit business – or in new and better animals such as merino sheep, horses or yaks. Also the construction of a new *saray* is a strategic long-term investment, which furthermore allows households to cope with insecure property rights over pastures. As they have enough livestock at hand, mid-sized and large farms also have less problems maintaining and widening their social relations with others. Being a generous host or a welcome guest is not so much a problem for them, because they can usually afford to slaughter an animal for their guests or to buy a present for others. Having sufficient savings available in the form of cash or livestock also allows them to observe the market and to sell when prices are best.

This distinction between only two types of trajectories may look like an oversimplification. In fact, I have argued earlier that livelihood trajectories are often complex and irregular, and that negative and positive trajectories can also overlap (see 2.4.3). However, what the rough sketch shows is that while asset-poor and asset-rich households often do the same – they sell animals, cultivate their land, and raise animals –, the outcomes of their activities can be completely different. While smallholders often adopt new activities when the need arises (and thus at short notice), mid-sized and large farm households can often plan ahead and consider the long-term effects of what they do. The ‘mining case’ introduced at the very beginning of this study is an excellent illustration of this.

The ambiguous outcomes of conflicting livelihood strategies

The fact that rich and poor people alike began to accept paid employment in the so-called *kombinat* particularly puzzled me about the ‘mining case’. However, considering the various uncertainties people are confronted with and their differing capacities to cope suggest that there may be different motivations behind people’s decision to adopt two seemingly conflicting income-generating activities.

For many smallholders and households without livestock, working in the *kombinat* may seem like the only way to improve their standard of living without having to migrate to urban areas. Often in immediate need of cash but usually short of financial capital, they must make use of every income opportunity, even if it threatens to seriously worsen the resource base on which their own pastoral production will depend in the future. Their lack of means to make a decent living, poor legislation, overlapping

authorities and an unreliable jurisdiction leave them in a weak position to negotiate and secure their future access to pastures. By comparison, the mining company seems a powerful actor that is capable of securing its commercial interests using the resource base – although it might not necessarily do this legally. In view of the insecure prospects of private pastoral production, working in the mine may appear a more reliable alternative to many.

By contrast, many wealthier households already have a diversified livelihood portfolio and sufficient savings in the form of livestock or cash. In addition, they are often in a stronger position to secure and defend their access to pastures. Thus, their need for an additional source of cash income may not be so immediate. Nevertheless, if compared to agro-pastoral production cycles and the related ecological uncertainties, even wealthy households may consider the insecure yet well-paid employment in the *kombinat* an attractive income opportunity. The difference, however, is that they seem to be in a better position than their less wealthy neighbors to secure long-term access to the remaining intensive pastures. Once the extractive industries have ploughed up the intensive pastures around *Kumbel*, local herders will have to move further afield to find sufficient pastures to tend their flocks. Access to pastures will have been negotiated afresh by then, with the same advantages for wealthier households.

Although such predictions are pure speculation, it seems probable that in the long run the combination of pastoral production and mining may further undermine the livelihoods of less wealthy households. Negative livelihood trajectories may thus be exacerbated in future, and current socioeconomic disparities between rural households may further increase. To put it simply, *those who already have* are usually in a better position to cope with uncertainty, while *those who have not* are often trapped in a vicious cycle of short-term response and further impoverishment. Given the array of uncertainties, escaping a negative trajectory is often difficult, all the more so since the various imponderables have anything but diminished in recent years. The two trajectories thus exemplify how various structural factors influence people's livelihoods in the long term, and that "(…) people make their own livelihoods, but not necessarily under conditions of their own choosing" (de Haan and Zoomers 2005, 43). In this way, the notion of livelihood trajectories can help to explain patterns of household impoverishment or asset accumulation over long periods of time.

12.4 Implications: closing the gap, reversing trajectories

The analysis of people's *livelihood trajectories* and the various factors governing them gives us a better understanding of various *transition trajectories*, i.e. processes of post-socialist transformation at the micro level. As I argued at the outset of this study, post-socialist transformation can best be understood as a bundle of non-linear, multi-directional and open-ended processes of structuration, in which actors at all levels recombine the old and the new, and improvise on practised routines in order to respond to particular challenges and opportunities. Therefore, a closer look at various local actors, the norms and orders they refer to, the decisions they take and the practices they deploy improves our understanding of post-socialist transformation, and thus of the long-term effects of transition policies. By and large, the results presented in this study suggest that the long-term effects of the socialist legacy and the agrarian reforms of the 1990s created a hybrid institutional context. In this context, many rural households still struggle to secure and make use of the property rights they were once endowed with. They are therefore often caught up in a negative livelihood trajectory from which they will find it difficult to escape under the given circumstances. The case of rural Kyrgyzstan thus provides a good example of the continuing impact of the neoliberal 'shock therapy' of the 1990s on rural livelihoods and institutions up to the present day.

One remaining question is how these negative trajectories and the aggravation of rural disparities might eventually be halted. In my analysis, I have identified various forms of uncertainty and the availability of negotiating power as the two main factors governing people's livelihood prospects. Improving these prospects therefore means either reducing uncertainty or improving people's negotiating power.

Reducing uncertainty

In recent years, a large number of development interventions have addressed transformation-related uncertainties through so-called 'institution building', i.e. the creation of new and 'stronger' institutions and organizations. Regarding natural resource management, the World Bank-initiated irrigation sector reform for instance tried to tackle ecological and livelihood uncertainties through the establishment of local Water Users' Associations, yet with mixed results (see Box 9a). Another prominent example is the recent reform of Kyrgyz pasture legislation, which was also initiated by the World Bank and paved the way for the establishment of local Pasture Users' Associations (see 10.5). Thus, the two interventions, which build on experience from other developing countries[161], respond to the same logic as the agrarian reforms of the 1990s, which promised to endow people with 'secure property rights' over resources and to introduce 'better' rules for production and marketing. However, as Nuijten (2005, 5) comments, the limitations of these approaches often lies in their

> "(…) faith that new forms of organizing and fresh rules can make a dramatic difference to the lives of the people and the management of resources. (…) Official rules may influence existing organizing practices and power relations in many different and often unpredictable ways." (Nuijten 2005, 5)

The evidence presented in this study underlines this concern. First, formal rules do not necessarily result in formal behavior, not even of those who are in charge of implementing these rules. Second, new regulations often coexist with older institutional arrangements, thus adding to a hybrid institutional context that generally benefits already powerful actors. This does not mean that creating new and better rules is pointless; in fact, the replacement of the 'old' pasture legislation was overdue, since it disadvantaged the poor and caused great trouble. It does , however, mean accepting that even the most well-intended policies cannot do away with uncertainty and will always produce unexpected outcomes:

> "There are two basic alternatives for planning in an uncertain world. The first aims to reduce uncertainties (…) by the collection of more and more data on more and more variables. (…) The alternative is to accept that uncertainty and indeterminacy are fundamental and central." (Scoones 1995, 6)

As analysis has shown, uncertainty is usually more problematic for the less wealthy, since they often lack the necessary negotiating power to make use of different norms and rules. At the same time, uncertainty can be beneficial to those with sufficient power, since it allows them to respond more flexibly to challenges and opportunities. Therefore, the fundamental question must be how the negotiating power of the less wealthy can be strengthened.

Building negotiating power

The general weakness of 'institution building' approaches lies in their assumption that the establishment of a communal resource user association creates a level playing field that allows all local actors to raise their interests and concerns (Leach at al. 1999, 241). However, while an association may in fact enhance a community's negotiating power towards state representatives, aid agencies or private actors such as mining companies, it does not necessarily enhance the negotiating power of individuals and

[161] The concept of Pasture Users' Associations, for instance, has already been tested in other countries, often with mixed results (Davies et al. 2010, 299).

households within that association. The example of the communal *tülöö* illustrates that powerful actors who cannot achieve their desired outcomes through open negotiation will do so through other means. Thus, if a resource user association is not only to serve those who are already wealthy and powerful, it must actively seek to strengthen the negotiating power of its less wealthy members.

One way of doing this would be to include even those households without any livestock at an early stage of the process, since most of them do intend to engage in animal husbandry again. This would also help to open up future negotiations within an association to public accountability (Stark and Bruszt 1998). A second way would be to inform people as openly and as early as possible about the new rules and conditions. In this way, knowledge uncertainties for those involved could be reduced to a minimum, and powerful actors would have less opportunity to renew their private control over assets while rejecting responsibility for associated liabilities. Unfortunately, this chance was missed during the process of reforming the pasture laws. While some herders formed their opinion about the new law on the basis of rumors and half-truths, most people had no idea about the imminent introduction of local associations and pasture user fees. Consequently, the announcement of new pasture fees in 2009 caused great public disarray and discontent, and this eventually even turned into one of the key driving forces behind the public uprising in Naryn *oblast* in winter 2009/10[162]. A third way of 'leveling the playing field' among rich and poor stakeholders would be to ensure effective sanctions and to calculate fines according to people's wealth. Otherwise, wealthy households will soon realize that the benefits of non-compliance outweigh the costs of cooperation, while poor households must obey the rules for economic reasons.

In the final analysis, however, the evidence presented in this study suggests that local processes of transformation – including changes in social relations, economic dependencies and individual organizing practices – are so complex and variable that it seems at least questionable whether a uniform 'institution building' approach can do justice to every single Kyrgyz community. What this study therefore suggests is that, under the current circumstances, the introduction of new rules and regulations in rural Kyrgyzstan needs careful consideration and must be embedded in a thorough understanding of people's livelihood trajectories and the locally specific processes that cause and reproduce disparities between potential stakeholders. Otherwise, apparently 'strong' rules and 'robust' institutions run the risk of widening the existing gap between rich and poor.

12.5 Open questions for future research

It can be both encouraging and frustrating to do research in a transformation context. Encouraging because the ongoing debates and processes in a 'young' state such as Kyrgyzstan are often of immediate relevance for fundamental aspects of human interaction and wellbeing, and because the simultaneity of the old and the new can be highly inspiring; frustrating because processes of transformation are sometimes too fast for the mechanism of scientific reflection. Thus, soon after I completed the fieldwork for this study, the Kyrgyz government passed entirely new legislation for the management of pastures. The same is true of the 'mining case' in Jergetal, which it was beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail. Consequently, many new questions have emerged, while others have remained.

First of all, it is to be expected that the implementation of the new Kyrgyz pasture legislation will initiate complex negotiations at various levels. After all, the mere

[162] Personal communication with Ulan Kasymov, former director of CAMP Ala-Too, 7 May 2010.

announcement of pasture fees in summer 2009 fuelled public discontent in Naryn and was one of the key factors behind the recent uprisings. Observing that process over the next few years and seeing how different groups of actors reposition themselves would certainly reveal new insights into the functioning of rural communities.

Second, I have identified a number of setbacks to the idea of collective action (see above). However, since most rural households are economically unviable, cooperating with others often seems the only way to escape the poverty trap. Therefore, finding ways of overcoming structural obstacles and the widespread aversion to any form of economic cooperation beyond the immediate household and kin seems of the utmost importance.

Third, the linkages between pastoral producers and agrarian commodity markets deserve more scientific attention. I have shown for instance that market access is an essential criterion in the selection of pastures. Thus, it would be interesting to examine how new forms of pastoral marketing could influence the use and management of pasture resources.

Finally, conflicts between herders and the mining industry have undoubtedly increased in recent years. While many of the larger gold mines in Kyrgyzstan have attracted public attention and are now the subject of intense media coverage, most of the smaller mines have so far gone unnoticed by the wider public. Yet it is often the small mines that disregard existing policies and regulations and try to access attractive deposits through informal means[163]. Thus, the potential for conflict between two major branches of the Kyrgyz economy – animal husbandry and mineral extraction – is likely to increase in the future, with as yet unknown consequences for the livelihoods of the rural population.

[163] Personal communication with Kuban Ashyrkulov, director of the Kyrgyz International Business Council, 13 May 2010.

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Appendix 1 Household survey questionnaire[164]

Household ID-No.:	.....
Name of Respondent:	.....
Name of Head of Household:	.....
No. of household members living… …at home (incl. children):	..... …in migration: .....
Total agricultural land of household… …owned (ha):	.....ha …rented in (ha): .....ha
Total no. of livestock owned by household:	no. of sheep: ..... no. of goats: .....
	no. of horses: ..... no. of cows: .....
	no. of other livestock (specify): ....
Where does the majority of your animals graze in summer:	1 Near-village pastures 2 Intensive pastures *(kyshtoo)* 3 Remote pastures *(jailoo)* Specify: 4 don't know .....
Does your HH rent any pastures:	1 yes 2 no 3 don't know
Main cash income activity of HH (more than 50%)	1 animal husbandry: meat 2 animal husbandry: wool 3 farming/agriculture 4 dairy 5 herding others' flocks 6 agricultural labour 7 non-farm labour 8 regular salaried job 9 trade or other business 10 remittances from migrant(s) If possible, specify: 11 old-age pension 12 other > specify .....
Secondary cash income activity of HH (less than 50%)	1 animal husbandry: meat 2 animal husbandry: wool 3 farming/agriculture 4 dairy 5 herding others' flocks 6 agricultural labour 7 non-farm labour 8 regular salaried job 9 trade or other business 10 remittances from migrant(s) If possible, specify: 11 old-age pension 12 other > specify ..... 13 none
Date: ...../ 2007	Name of surveyor: .....

[164] During the survey, the enumerators used a Kyrgyz version of this questionnaire.

Appendix 2 Checklist for semi-structured interviews with household representatives

Life in the USSR
Memories of the collectivization
Household occupation and income
Level of education
Professional status of respondent/head of household
Land owenrship and use
Livestock ownership
Herding practices
Life of herders
Marketing of products
Role of party membership
Structure of kolkhoz / hierarchies
Existing disparities

Privatization (early 1990s)
General impressions of Soviet collapse
Memories of distribution process
Involvement of respondent in distribution
How much animals, land, machines, barns received?
Role of *uruu*, *uruu baschy*
Occupation, until when ordinary salary
Land use & herding practices in early 1990s

Animal husbandry since mid-1990s
General importance of livestock / pastures
Development of private flock size / type
Main obstacles & opportunities
Marketing of animals (where, when)
Herding practices (own, others, relatives)
Herding arrangements (prices, terms, duration)
Criteria to select a herder
Pasture types in use; flock rotation
Herding as a livelihood option
Fodder preparation / sale / purchase
Use of barns
Role of state (local government)
Conflicts

Land cultivation since mid-1990s
General importance of arable land
Land holdings (location, quantity)
Land lease (out/in)
Land sale / purchase
Land use (season, crop, quantities)
Marketing of output / self-consumption
Main obstacles & opportunities
Use of machines: Terms, prices, practices
Irrigation: Terms, prices, practices
Labour: Terms, prices, practices
Role of state (local government)
Conflicts

Credits and loans
Use of credits: When, from whom, for what
Conditions and procedures
Main obstacles & opportunities
Reasons not to take credits

Cooperation
Experiences regarding cooperation with others
If yes: When, why, with whom, how
If no: Why not
If failed: Why, when

Role of the state
Experiences regarding state support
Role of the state regarding animal husbandry
Role of the state regarding land cultivation
Contacts with *ayil okmotu*, *ayil kengesh*, *rayon*

Pasture use / herders
Since when, where, seasonal rotation
Pasture selection criteria
Pasture lease
If yes: Since when, terms, procedures, motivation, use of contract
If no: Why not, awareness of formal rules
Conflicts with others / with state
Contacts with neighbours (*sherine*, *ashar*)
Perceived quality of pastures (in the past / today)
Observed trends
Marketing of pastoral products
Organization of household
Contact with village, relatives
Fodder preparation
Contact with customers
Role of local government (rules, regulations)
Role of *uruu* for pasture selection
Awareness of new pasture law; personal opinion
Personal opinion about pasture user association

Livelihood alternatives / outlook
Did you ever want to do something completely different?
What would you like to do in future? What is your plan?

Appendix 3 Checklist for semi-structured interviews with representatives of herding households

Household mobility
Since when in this place (this year, general)
Movements since summer 2007
Organization of transport to/from pastures (costs)

Organization of household
Since when engaged in herding
How many people involved
Who is doing what
If paid helper: Terms, conditions
Fodder preparation

Herd structure
How many own animals / type
How many customer animals / type
Development of flock size / type over recent years
Number and type of customers
Agreements with customers (salary, losses, diseases)
Observed trends

Pasture use
Since when, where, seasonal rotation
Pasture selection criteria
Role of *uruu* for pasture selection
Role of local government (rules, regulations)
Pasture lease
  If yes: Since when, terms, procedures, motivation, use of contract
  If no: Why not, awareness of formal rules
Conflicts with others / with state
Contacts with neighbours (*sherine*, *ashar*)
Awareness of new pasture law; personal opinion
Personal opinion about pasture user association

Pasture quality
Perceived quality of pastures (in the past / today)

Marketing
Type of products (milk products / meat)
Prices (trends)
Traders / customers: Who, where, how often
General importance of marketing (income)
Importance of dung marketing (income)

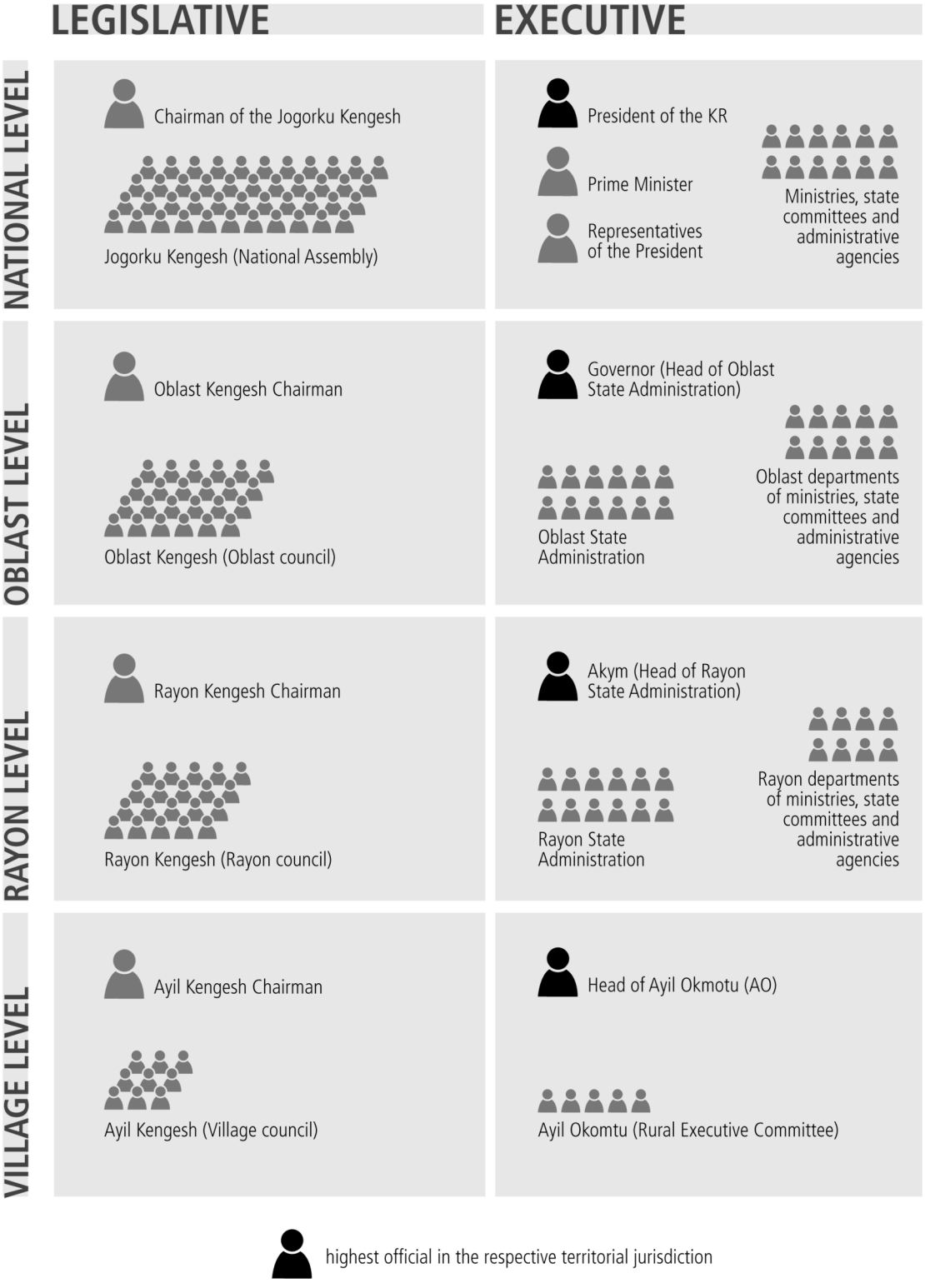
Social contacts
General importance of neighbours on the pastures
Contacts with other herders: With whom, when, how often, for what (*sherine*, *ashar*)
Contacts with customers
Contacts with relatives in the village

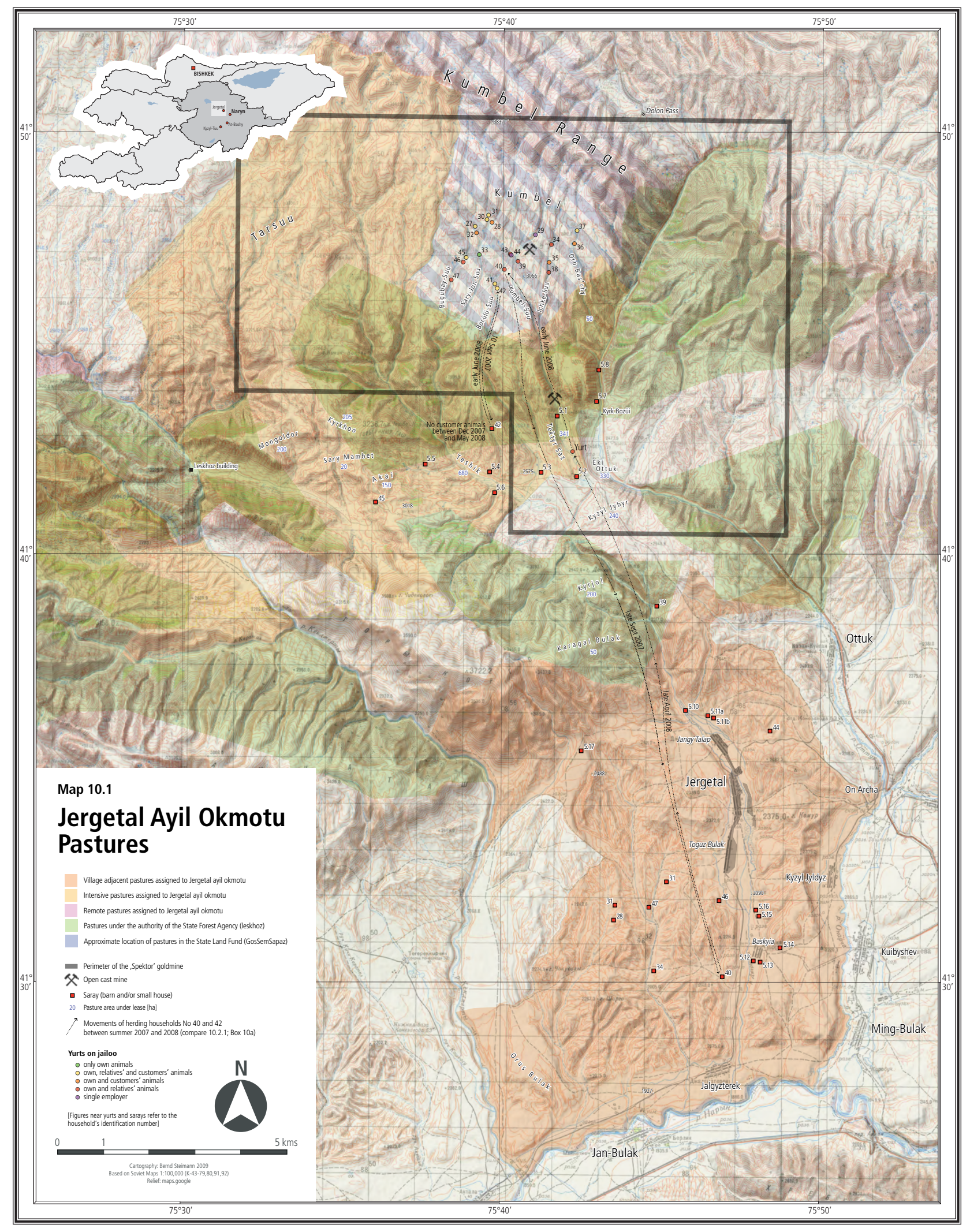
Outlook
What would you like to do in future? Will you stay in the same place? How will pasture use develop in general?

Appendix 4 List of expert interviews, 2006 to 2009

Date	Person, function
3.10.2006	Akylbek Rakaev, Chairman of the Kyrgyz Sheep Breeders' Association, Bishkek
6.10.2006	Pierre-Yves Suter, Manager Kyrgyz-Swiss Agriculture Project, Helvetas, Bishkek
12.4.2007	Kubat Nazarkulov, MAWRPI livestock specialist, Bishkek
14.4.2007	Jinara Aidarbekova, Lawyer with the World Bank in Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek
8.5.2007	Eshpolot Osorov, Deputy director of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department, Bishkek
17.5.2007	Ishenbek Abakirov, Senior Specialist for Social Development, Jergetal *ayil okmotu*
18.5.2007	Mars Kulanbaev, Director Water User Association, Jergetal village
22.5.2007	Gulmira Tashtanbekova, Sectretary of Karakojun *ayil okmotu*
22.5.2007 7.12.2007	Myrsabek Aidaraliev, Head of Karakojun *ayil okmotu*
24.5.2007 11.12.2007 30.7.2008	Abakir Sadyrov, Pasture Department representative for Naryn *rayon / oblast*, Naryn
30.5.2007	Jangyl Kozhomuratova, Microcredit specialist with CAMP Ala-Too and GTZ, Bishkek
24.9.2007	Mukan Mambetakunov, MAWRPI Representative for Naryn *oblast*, Naryn
9.10.2006 4.4.2007	Kyrgyzbay Alagushev, Senior specialist RAS, Bishkek
23 & 25.10.2007 9 & 14.11.2007	Muratbek Askerimov, Land use specialist Jergetal *ayil okmotu*
15.11.2007	Sagynbübü Sydykbekova, Secretary of Jergetal *ayil okmotu*
16.11.2007	Azamat Sabyrbekov, Naryn rayon *leskhoz*, Naryn
19.11.2007	Sulaika Mambetalieva, UNDP Poverty Reduction Programme Naryn *oblast*, Naryn
19.11.2007	Sergey Kim, General manager FINCA for Naryn *oblast*, Naryn
4.12.2007 1.8.2008	Jeenbek Aidarov, Land use specialist Karakojun *ayil okmotu*
5.12.2007	Jeenaly Murzaliev, MAWRPI Representative At-Bashy *rayon*, At-Bashy
16.8.2008	Kalkan Kerimaliev, Local historian, Kyzyl-Tuu
28.8.2008	Beishenbek Kasymov, Chairman of the Jergetal TPS
29.8.2008	Mr. Yrysaliev, Head of Jergetal *aiyl okmotu*
11.9.2008	Abdymalik Egemberdiev, Director of the Kyrgyz Pasture Department, Bishkek
11.9.2008	Sharsheke Kaynazarov, Former land use specialist Jergetal *ayil okmotu*, Bishkek
15.9.2008	Anarbek Matysakov, Former specialist at the sector for agriculture of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Bishkek
15.9.2008	Baibek Usubaliev, Programme officer with UNDP/GEF, Bishkek
16.9.2008	Erlan Karbai Uluu, Project manager of the ARIS pasture component, Bishkek
17.9.2008	Amantur Japarov, Social anthroplogist, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, Bishkek
7.5.2010	Ulan Kasymov, former director of CAMP Ala-Too, Berlin
13.5.2010	Kuban Ashyrkulov, Director of the Kyrgyz International Business Council, Bishkek

Appendix 5 Structure of public administration in Kyrgyzstan (own figure; based on Alymkulov and Kulatov 2003; TACIS 2005; Ibraimova 2009)





Map 10.1

Jergetal Ayil Okmotu Pastures

- Village adjacent pastures assigned to Jergetal ayil okmotu
- Intensive pastures assigned to Jergetal ayil okmotu
- Remote pastures assigned to Jergetal ayil okmotu
- Pastures under the authority of the State Forest Agency (leskhoz)
- Approximate location of pastures in the State Land Fund (GosSemSapaz)

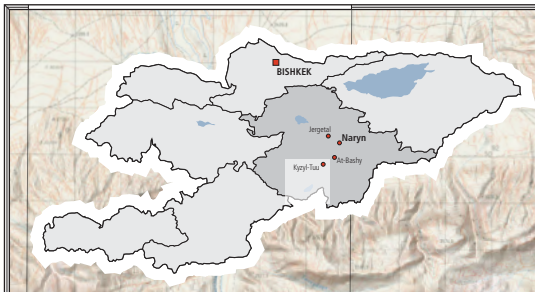
- Perimeter of the ‚Spektor' goldmine
- Open cast mine
- Saray (barn and/or small house)
- 20 Pasture area under lease [ha]
- Movements of herding households No 40 and 42 between summer 2007 and 2008 (compare 10.2.1; Box 10a)

Yurts on jailoo

- only own animals
- own, relatives' and customers' animals
- own and customers' animals
- own and relatives' animals
- single employer

[Figures near yurts and sarays refer to the household's identification number]

Cartography: Bernd Steimann 2009
Based on Soviet Maps 1:100,000 (K-43-79,80,91,92)
Relief: maps.google



74°40′ 74°50′ 75°00′ 75°10′ 75°20′ 75°30′ 75°40′

41° 00′

40° 50′

40° 40′

40° 30′

Barn
Yurt
Botosh
15 March 2008
end of November
April in Bishkek
1 May 2008
Karabulung
Kyzyl-Tuu
Oct / Nov in Kyzyl-Tuu
Kasybek
10 June 2008
Jamantoo Range
At-Bashy Range
Ak-Beyit
Kurgon-Tash
Ak-Say
Arpa
10 June 2008
25 Sept 2007
Chatyr Köl
So'ök
Kuzkhon Tash
Kyzyl-Döbö
Torugart Range
CHINA

Map 10.2

Karakojun Ayil Okmotu Pastures

Approximate location of village-adjacent pastures assigned to Karakojun ayil okmotu

Approximate location of intensive pastures assigned to Karakojun ayil okmotu

(Approximate location of) remote pastures assigned to Karakojun ayil okmotu

Saray (barn and/or small house)

Movements of herding household No 3 between summer 2007 and 2008 (compare 10.2.1; Box 10a)

Yurts on jailoo

- only own animals
- own, relatives' and customers' animals
- own and customers' animals
- own and relatives' animals
- single employer
- yurt from other ayil okmotu

[Figures near yurts and sarays refer to the household's identification number]

N

0 1 5 kms

Cartography: Bernd Steimann 2009
Based on Soviet Maps 1:100,000 (K-43-103,104,114,115,116,126,127)
Relief: maps.google